Participation of children in the Vietnam War, 1955-1975

Mai Anh Nguyen

This thesis is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Politics and International Relations

Goldsmiths, University of London

Acknowledgements

Writing this section takes me back to one gloomy September morning in 2019, when I and my friend and colleague, Mabel, were drinking tea in my kitchen. I asked Mabel: 'Do you think there should be signs that, despite everything, you will be okay?'

Mabel said: 'I believe you already have them.'

She was right. At that moment, I thought about the following people.

My supervisors, Dr Jeremy Larkins and Dr David Brenner, who have poured so much heart, thought, and patience into every supervision session and every comment. They have always gone above and beyond in reading my writing and meticulously pointing out every way in which I could improve. I owe much of my intellectual development to the hours and hours we have spent on talking through my ideas, my data, and my thesis.

My interviewees, who showed incredible willingness to share their experiences with me. I cannot stress their kindness in accommodating me and making me feel welcome, from sharing meals to opening up about their stories with astonishing openness and vulnerability. I hope this thesis conveys even a fraction of their courage, endurance, and compassion.

My parents, without whom this thesis would not be possible. They have provided me with endless support, particularly with helping me arrange and navigate the logistics of my interviews, and gain access to Vietnamese books and archives when the pandemic made travel impossible. Through good times and bad, they were always cheering me on and were my source of strength.

My PhD colleagues and my friends, who have provided wisdom, support, and many laughs. I particularly thank Mabel and Dimitra for our bursts of laughter outside the graduate 'dungeon' which made every day so much brighter; Carla and Ekaterina for helping navigate the life of a PhD student; Josephine and Freya for their very practical help; Maria and Hiep for believing in me no matter what. I love you all very much.

The financial assistance for this project, which came from Goldsmiths PhD Scholarship, the Laidlaw Foundation, and the Sir John Plumb Trust. I am particularly grateful to Professor Joachim Whaley from Sir John Plumb Trust for his kindness and trust in my work.

A simple 'thank you' does not seem enough to express my gratitude and the role so many people played in helping this thesis come to life. Nevertheless, thank you all. You are my signs.

Abstract

This thesis argues that child soldiering is a socially embedded phenomenon. To this end, I analysed child soldiering in the context of the Vietnam War, interviewing former child soldiers about their lives prior, during, and after joining the Viet Cong guerrillas. Deploying an interpretative framework drawing on Bourdieu's relational sociology, I found that in Vietnam, children's social context – in particular, the prevalence of Confucianism and communism – consistently guided children's motivations and shaped their experience. The findings of this thesis demonstrate that while ideology and sociocultural practices formed the experience of Vietnamese child soldiers, they were able to negotiate and navigate them in ways that demonstrate considerable agency. The findings of this thesis have the following implications. Firstly, this thesis challenges the 'the 'victim-perpetrator' binary, through which child soldiers are often represented. Rather, it underlines that children have agency as deeply social and political actors, who shape and are shaped by their environment. In doing so, this thesis contributes to our understanding of not only child soldiers' experiences, but also of children in militarised contexts, and specifically the role that everyday social practices play in militarisation of childhood. Secondly, these findings contribute to the literature on the Vietnam War, uncovering new evidence of the many roles that children played in the Viet Cong. The insight that the broader social environment impacted child soldiering in Vietnam can be deployed in future research on child soldiering in under-studied geographical and cultural contexts. Such an understanding will enhance our general knowledge of the phenomenon of child soldiering and the variety of ways in which children participate in war. In doing so, this thesis contributes to broader re-imagining childhood as a complex, nuanced, and dynamic phenomenon.

Contents

Introduction

Children have consistently been active participants in military conflicts throughout history. Whether in ancient Spartan society with its harsh preparation for military life for 7-year-old boys (Lazenby, 2012), or Soviet 'sons of the regiment' during World War II (Merridale, 2012), children have performed a range of tasks and jobs as messengers, fighters, spies, and nurses. Children participated in wars, had legends written about their lives and deaths, and were upheld as examples of bravery and courage. Some are still involved in wars today – while the exact number is unknown, Wessells (2006) estimates that there are 300,000 child soldiers in the world at any given moment.

Remarkably little, however, is known about why children participate in armed conflicts, how they experience and interpret ongoing events, and how they navigate post-war life. Media reports and documents issued by international organisations have been criticised by academics as unreliable sources for the production of such knowledge because of their tendency to present a dichotomous view of young combatants (Lee, 2009). On the one hand, child soldiers are portrayed as 'sociopaths caught up in cycles of unrelenting and irrational cruelty', inherently ignorant, bloodthirsty, and barbaric (Denov and Maclure, 2007, p. 244). On the other, they are portrayed as helpless, passive victims, to whom events happen, rather than subjects actively and intelligently navigating their surrounding environment. As Beier (2015) notes, sometimes children have to literally become victims for their actions to draw any kind of attention – see the case of Malala Yousafzai, who only gained recognition as an activist after being shot by the Taliban, despite having been involved in activist work prior to this event. Yet, as Rosen (2015) argues, research by academics, ethnographers, and childhood studies scholars working with children demonstrates that children's participation in armed conflict cannot be reduced to passive victimhood. Rather, there needs to be an acknowledgement of children's agency, their internal complex worlds, and the political and social processes they are embedded in.

This thesis joins the growing body of scholarly work which aims to foreground the personal testimonies of former child soldiers and to frame them within an understanding of the intersection of sociocultural practices, wider political contexts, and children's own understanding of wars. In building this argument, this thesis looks at the lives of former Vietnamese child soldiers in the Vietnam War prior, during, and after they joined the military conflict. While acknowledging their active participation, this thesis aims to contribute to the existing research on child soldiering by tracing how their childhoods were shaped by their social, cultural and political contexts, including

a Confucian society and communist ideology. These forces played an important role in predisposing and shaping children's experience of working with guerrillas and cannot be ignored if we are to make sense of why and how children participate in military conflicts. In considering these multiple factors alongside former child soldiers' own testimonies of their agency, I aim to present an account of young combatants which goes beyond the tendency to dehumanise child soldiering. On the contrary, I hope this thesis provides a platform for a nuanced and empathetic reading of their experiences.

1. Child soldiering research: an overview

1.1 Children's victimhood and agency

Despite the empirical significance of children participating in military conflict, as Haer (2019) points out, child soldiers have not attracted much attention from scholars and academics. The child 'remains a silent force – very few writers address in any critical way either their role, or the implications of concept' (Watson, 2006, p. 239). Media reports and international organisation documents, as I have noted before, often present children as either victims or thoughtless perpetrators. The academic research that does focus on child soldiers has repeatedly questioned such a binary representation. Tabak (2020), for example, challenges such constructions of children by stating that while writers are making assumptions for children, they are not working with children. Multiple studies have been dedicated to tracing how simplified representations of child soldiers are reflective of adults' (rather than children's) concerns, and the potential drawbacks of this representation of child soldier's experience. See, for example, Hart's (2006, p. 218) critique that such 'dichotomizing is in keeping with the current '"knee-jerk moralism" of neo-conservatism which, as Henry Giroux has argued, "divides the world into good and evil and has replaced the possibility of dialogue and debate"'.

Indeed, studies which have interviewed children directly about their political and military experience suggest that young combatants are capable of engaging in politics meaningfully and actively. Cortes and Buchanan (2007) have indicated many areas where Colombian child soldiers maintain a sense of agency: even within highly restrictive circumstances, children in their study maintained a sense of hope for the future, actively fostered warm relationships with other children, and refused to dehumanise the enemy, thus maintaining respect for human life despite propaganda. Former Liberian child soldiers studied by Utas (2011) have shown a considerable

ability to navigate the post-war environment, often using the 'victim' image to improve access to educational and employment opportunities. Similarly, Denov (2011, p. 193) has demonstrated that, 'contrary to being passive or powerless, as is often assumed of former child soldiers, and despite significant structural barriers and challenges', the accounts of former Sierra Leonean child soldiers highlighted their 'agency and social navigation in the aftermath of war'.

These studies represent important work which humanises child soldiers, acknowledging that their experience is more complex than that of passive victimhood. However, there is still considerable space to research child soldiering in different contexts. This, I hope, can help to further our understanding of how children come to participate in armed conflicts, and how their experiences of war as well as post-conflict reintegration are shaped by the interplay of political, social, and cultural forces.

1.2. A relational approach to child soldiering

In recent years, many scholars have called for a prioritisation of children's agency as a starting point of research, rather than the final conclusion (Thomas, 2016). In doing so, Gleason (2016) argues, it becomes possible to pay particular attention to how children's agency is intertwined with and shaped by wider social, historical, and cultural forces. In line with these calls, I have employed a relational approach as my conceptual framework to analyse the experience of child soldiers. Specifically, I have used Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital. These concepts have been emphasised by scholars such as Rosenoff (2010) as particularly useful because they help contextualise children's actions within their specific environment which they inhabit. These tools allowed me recognise that individuals can be creative, active, and innovative; however, there is also much space to consider how personal history and social context have predisposed people to take certain actions which may not make sense to an outsider. In addition, there is also space to consider what agency may look like for people who exist in highly restrictive circumstances and for whom agency does not manifest as active resistance or rebellion, but rather as obedience and making the best out of one's circumstances. All of these considerations are useful when applied to children. To gain more insight into Vietnamese child soldiering, I therefore utilise the Bourdieusian relational approach to analyse the phenomenon in its social and political context.

The importance of understanding the cultural context of child soldiering has already been advocated by Shepler (2014). In her study on children in Sierra Leone, she found that children's participation in military activities was continuous with many cultural and social practices already

present in children's lives. This is a country, she argues, where child labour is a part of being a child; where models of child fosterage are common and therefore separation from one's biological parents is not a unique and shocking phenomenon. Therefore, for the vast majority of children who end up fighting for the Revolutionary United Front, the duties they carry out remain within a familiar framework. Pauletto and Patel (2010) have similarly critiqued the lack of understanding of the cultural context within which child soldiering in the Congo has taken place, pointing out that childhood is frequently closely connected to associations with witchcraft and magical abilities, which in turn leads many children to leave their homes and join armed groups. Coulter (2008), while acknowledging that girl soldiers in Sierra Leone made active choices, similarly points out that these need to be seen as shaped by convention, religion, and other social relations within which these girls were embedded.

Guided by these calls to take children's social and cultural context into account, I have traced the impact of Confucianism on Vietnamese child soldiers' motivations and experiences. Employing Bourdieu's tools for analysis has also helped me to uncover how many Confucian social practices, such as filial piety, concern with 'saving face', and collectivism, were deeply internalised by children. Using these tools to understand children's social context, I have been able to trace how Vietnamese cultural expectations of childhood became such an essential part of children's everyday life that they guided their motivations and experiences of taking up arms. These social practices, even if not articulated consciously, were nevertheless powerful in shaping children's motivations and experience. With the help of a Bourdieusian analytical framework, then, this thesis demonstrates that an understanding of these sociocultural practices cannot be ignored when considering the phenomenon of child soldiering in Vietnam. Such insights also have implications for wider research on child soldiers beyond Vietnam: as Wessells (2019) argues, in order to humanise child soldiers and provide adequate resources for their reintegration, there is a need to place their experiences in a complex historical and cultural context.

Beyond Confucianism, there is one aspect of social context which cannot be ignored within Vietnamese military struggles: the prominence and impact of communist ideology on experiences of child soldiers. Ideology currently occupies an ambiguous space within the academic literature on child soldiering. As observed by Kurochenko (2011) the majority of the current studies that focus on ideology tend to analyse it in the context of mediating children's reintegration post-conflict. What is often missing is an account of the way in which ideology directly shapes social practices and therefore predisposes children to take up arms. For Özerdem, Podder, & Quitoriano (2010, p. 305) the literature 'fails' to engage with situations where children 'joining an armed group

is a natural progression in social existence, is community mediated and ideologically sanctioned'. This is not surprising, given the disinterest in ideology in contemporary conflict studies. Sanin and Wood (2014, p. 213) explain this disinterest as being a consequence of an assumption that 'ideologies are simply rhetorical devices', 'merely window wash, crafted to capture support and resources from international audiences during the Cold War'. Ugarizza and Craig (2013, p. 446) echo these observations, suggesting that 'contemporary armed conflicts have been increasingly characterized as transnational, resource-driven, private ventures with diminished political agendas'. In other words, the place of ideology is typically associated with the so-called 'old wars'. Child soldiers are, in Macdonald's (2008, p. 135) words, 'emblematic' of new wars. Yet, as Ugarizza and Craig (2013) further argue, empirical evidence on many contemporary conflicts (frequently coming from fields such as social psychology) points to an important role played by ideology in shaping participants' specific understandings of the world, manifesting itself in doctrines, myths, and symbols which many rebel groups use to guide their actions. Approached in this way, ideology cannot only be reduced to an instrumental means for mobilisation. Rather, as Sanin and Wood (2014, p. 214) assert, we need to (re)focus our attention on the political, as 'all armed groups engaged in political violence – including ethnic separatist groups – do so on the basis of an ideology'. In order to address the role of ideology in shaping child soldiering experiences, I will pay particular attention to how the rise of communism has interacted with other socio-cultural forces, such as the Confucian cultural framework, in shaping the lives of young Vietnamese combatants.

1.3 Child soldiering in Asian conflicts

The Vietnam War, where Vietnamese guerrilla forces have fought against the US, is not typically associated with child soldiering. This is despite the fact that children played a significant role in the Vietnamese fighting forces in conflicts that have become paradigmatic case studies for some of the most well-known research on revolutionary warfare, especially that on peasant insurgencies (for example, Popkin's 1979 work on the 'rational peasant' and James Scott's 1976 text on the 'moral economy of the peasant' were both grounded in the Vietnamese revolutions). While role of women in both wars has been analysed in great detail (see Taylor, 1999; Rydstrøm, 2012), child soldiering in Vietnam has received much less scholarly attention.

This omission can be put down to several factors. Firstly, Asia, in general, is an under-researched continent in the field of conflict studies. This is reflected in the literature on child soldiers. Beyond Vietnam, children have participated in various Asian military conflicts, being

particularly significant actors in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos (see Chen, 2014; Pholsena, 2017; Barnitz, Path & Catalla, 2001). Yet, the continent is rarely associated with child soldiers and therefore, the experiences of these children remain under-studied. This mirrors a more general lack of interest in Asian military conflicts noted by Brenner and Han (2022). Pointing out the sociology of knowledge production in the field of Security Studies, they identify multiple reasons for such an absence, which are echoed in the literature on child soldiers.

Firstly, there is the question of 'proximity to the foreign policy agendas of Western states', which shape the accessibility and funding available to researchers (Brenner & Han, 2022, p. 7). As is the case with wider research on military conflicts, research on child soldiering is one example of how policy interests have steered academic research to some places rather than others. Brenner and Han (2022, p. 8) contend that Sierra Leone and Uganda receive much scholarly attention as both are 'sites of major Western peacemaking and peacebuilding efforts'. Meanwhile, the West did not intervene in Chechnya, and there is considerably less academic attention on this country's experience with war and security. Similar trends inform the literature on child soldiering: Sierra Leone, Uganda, and Liberia (but not Chechnya or Vietnam) have become major sources of knowledge about young combatants.

Furthermore, Asia is particularly difficult to research because of access and language barriers. As Brenner and Han (2022, p. 11) point out, English-speaking countries such as Uganda, Liberia and Sierra Leone have become the 'preferred destinations for conducting fieldwork on armed conflict' and thus dominate the discipline's understanding of armed conflict. Issues of access and language mean that the voices of people in other military conflicts are missed, and the material available on these military conflicts can only be accessed through English texts. Yet, the perspectives of actors who participated in civil wars, rebellions, and other forms of armed conflict can produce valuable insights into the wider dynamics of conflict, as they are retold in the insurgents' own words, thus uncovering what was desirable, possible, and thinkable for them (Schuurman & Eijkman, 2013). If most of our conceptual knowledge about war comes from a limited number of cases, however, it may not always be applicable to other social, cultural, and political contexts. Therefore, the 'silences' on Asian conflicts contribute to a narrowing of the understanding of war and security in general.

Another reason why the Vietnamese conflicts are not associated with child soldiering within Western academic research is likely rooted in the fact that child soldiers are, as I have highlighted above, associated with the so-called 'new wars'. Vietnamese military conflicts, on the other hand, are typically classified as 'old wars' (e.g. in Sarkesian & Connor, 2006). While there have been

studies exploring the role of child soldiers in the so-called 'old wars', they are significantly under-studied in comparison to child soldiering in what is seen to be the paradigm of contemporary conflict. The significance of investigating Vietnamese child soldier experiences, then, lies in uncovering the dimensions of child soldiering which have been frequently overlooked in the literature, such as the role of ideology and Confucianist social practices.

2. Child soldiering in Vietnam

Vietnamese revolutionary war against the US presents fruitful empirical grounds for investigating the phenomenon of child soldiering. Military conflicts in the country lasted for over thirty years, therefore inevitably transforming social contexts in both villages and cities. The extent to which the war shaped the everyday experiences of various Vietnamese communities has already been explored extensively. For example, Jamieson (1995) presents a thorough investigation of the transformation of Vietnamese society in both rural and urban settings as it encountered the West, colonialism, and communism. Pham (1999) has traced changes to the Vietnamese family resulting from the country's history with war and guerrilla warfare. These works make it clear that the Vietnamese conflict with the US present a complicated interweaving of various social forces including colonialism, the impact of the Cold War, communism, and religion.

Yet, even these detailed studies make almost no mention of how Vietnamese military conflicts and childhood interacted, how children responded to the ongoing events around them, and how it shaped their choices and courses of action. By addressing these questions, my research will bring forward the accounts of children whose experiences have so far been overlooked in the literature on child soldiering as well as Vietnamese military conflicts.

It is important to note that in Vietnam itself, children working for guerrillas was rather common. Within Vietnamese society, their role is widely recognised to this day. Multiple books and memoirs, written by people who served as children and as teenagers, have been published in Vietnamese[1]. Many people are proud of having participated in and 'contributed to a revolution' at such a young age. For example, in the documentary 'Trường Sơn một thời con gái' (Truong Son – a time of girlhood) produced by Quốc Phòng TV (a Vietnamese channel exclusively dedicated to issues of national security, defence, and politics), several former girl soldiers cheerfully report

---

[1] Some of the more well-known works include - Tuổi thơ dữ dội [Violent childhood] by Phùng Quán (1988), Đội Thiếu Niên Du Kích Đình Bảng [Dinh Bang's children's guerrilla team] by Xuân Sách (2012), Mãi mãi thiếu sinh quân [Forever a cadet] by Ma Văn Kháng (2019).

that they were 'not of age', and they volunteered to join the guerrillas at fifteen or sixteen years old. In general, the issue of Vietnamese young fighters is a known and openly discussed fact in Vietnamese society – notably, documentaries about them have been produced and approved by national television, which also indicates the lack of stigma accompanying child soldiering activities. The limited focus on Vietnamese child soldiers in Western academic literature, however, does not reflect the empirical significance and commonly accepted knowledge in Vietnam of their participation.

This is not to say that there has been no acknowledgement of Vietnamese child soldiers in academic literature. Of note here are works by Guillemot (2009), who drew attention to the unimaginably difficult conditions in which Vietnamese teenage soldiers had to work, and how they subsequently shaped their lives after the war; and Huynh (2015), who argued that familiarity with Vietnamese culture and its emphasis on legends and folktales is necessary to understand why some children participated in the military struggles. Both works provide important insights into the social practices surrounding Vietnamese children at the time.

These works, however, do not explicitly draw the connection, nor do they aim to investigate directly how Vietnamese childhood was shaped by both communist ideology and Confucian social practices. I therefore pay particular attention to how the notion of 'ideal' Vietnamese childhood was altered by the presence of guerrillas and their mobilisation and propaganda tactics (which, in turn, were inspired by a specific political ideology – communism). The Viet Cong guerrillas strategically and deliberately launched an 'all-people' mobilisation campaign in Vietnam (Vo, 2015). This campaign included regular propaganda meetings and performances, as well as one-on-one persuasion conversations. In the messaging of the propaganda campaigns, the guerrillas made use of popular traditional Vietnamese concepts and traditions such as 'good Confucian man', 'filial piety', 'honour', or 'duty' to recruit more people into the guerrilla group.

By investigating how the communist ideology intertwined with Vietnamese Confucian social practices, I analyse how existing social expectations around childhood enabled child soldiering in Vietnam and profoundly shaped children's experience during and after war. One example of such concerns is the importance which guerrillas placed on family and filial piety. Investigating this aspect of their mobilisation tactic has led me to understand the role of family in child soldiering. Family is often absent in the findings about child soldiers in African societies, only appearing either as a tranquil environment from which children are forcibly removed (e.g. in Denov & Maclure, 2007), or a broken institution which causes children to flee and find their secondary family in armed groups (Somasundaram, 2002; Yinusa et. al, 2018). In the case of Vietnam, the

family was neither the tranquil apolitical environment, nor a broken institution, but rather one of the forces which predisposed children to take up arms. There is still much research to be done as to how precisely family constitutes a social space which enables child soldiering, but the case of Vietnam provided some insights, e.g. by showing how affection and filial piety can be powerful political motivators. In analysing this case study and teasing out how factors such as family predispose children to take up arms, I foreground these understudied aspects of child soldiering. In addition to family, I have made similar empirical insights with regards to the role of communism, collectivism, and importance of child labour, which have also been overlooked in the literature on child soldiering to date.

3. Research questions

The data and analysis presented in this thesis aim to critically engage with the phenomenon of child soldiering in the Viet Cong in its struggle against the American forces. To this end, I will employ a Bourdieusian relational approach in order to trace the motivations, experiences, and post-conflict reintegration of the former Viet Cong child soldiers, all of whom participated in the military conflicts while under the age of 18.

I will analyse children's lives before, during, and after participation in military conflict. This framework allows me to present a complex and nuanced picture of Vietnamese child soldiering: as an experience affected by children's personal history which, in turn, affected their future experiences. For example, factors which led and permitted children to consider child soldiering as a viable option will impact their subsequent experiences with guerrillas. In collecting my empirical data, I paid particular attention to the following questions:

- Why did child soldiers join guerrilla movements during the Vietnam War?
- What experiences did children have once they joined the Viet Cong guerrilla group and how did they understand them?
- How did children reintegrate into civilian life after the military conflicts?

These are the empirical questions the thesis will address. In doing so, my research is concerned to understand how deep structural factors which derived from an integration of political context and social practices impacted child soldiers' motivations and courses of action. I will argue that in order to understand the experience of child soldiers we must begin by paying attention to how both the politics of military conflicts and related sociocultural practices affected them.

Therefore, throughout my data collection and analysis, I have paid particular attention to the following theoretical questions:

- How do the politics of military conflict shape the social context within which child soldiers operate?
- More specifically, what role does ideology play in shaping the sociocultural practices of child soldiering?

These questions have helped me navigate and understand the phenomenon of Vietnamese child soldiering, showing how it has been shaped not only by children's own agency, but by sociocultural and political context. The analysis cannot be divorced from the fact that children, like adults, are complicated and diverse beings. They consciously and unconsciously navigate and affect their social and political environment; they have their own personal histories and rich internal worlds. All of these factors need to be taken into account in order to gain a deeper understanding of why, in the case of Vietnam, some children decided to take up arms, how they interpreted their experience as guerrillas, and how it affected their lives after war.

4. Structure

The dissertation is structured as follows. In the literature review, which comprises Chapter 1, I synthesise and summarise relevant academic research on child soldiering. In particular, I evaluate the scholarship's engagement with the concept of children's agency. The 'agency argument' has emerged as a response to popular representations of child soldiers as passive victims; asserting that children can – and do – actively participate in social life, including in wars. However, this argument, too, has been criticised for its presumption of a liberal subject: one which is necessarily rational, always possesses free will, and acts free of any structural restrictions. I align my research with more recent scholarship which uses agency as a starting point, rather than an end argument, and considers children's agency within the many limitations they face due to their age, economic and social position, and gender. I then demonstrate that while the literature on child soldiering in Vietnam has already engaged with the impact of sociocultural practices, it is less attuned to the way in which political ideology interacts with socio-cultural practices in forming the context within which child soldiering takes place.

Chapter 2 outlines my conceptual framework which draws on relational sociology, mobilising Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, field, and capital as analytical tools for studying child soldiering.

I do so by putting relational scholarship on insurgencies into conversation with relational studies on childhood. This framework guides my analysis to the social structures within which the personal histories of child soldiers unfold. Specifically, I argue that this relational approach provides a framework within which we can understand the motivations and experiences of Vietnamese child soldiers as unfolding within the nexus of their insurgent habitus in a communist, revolutionary society and their habitus as children in Confucian Vietnam.

Chapter 3 summarises my method, which is informed by my conceptual framework. I explain why the most appropriate data collection method for my purposes is life history interviews. I then outline how I approached my interlocutors, interpreted their responses, and translated my data. As Bourdieu's relational approach requires the researcher to be particularly reflexive about their research, I also discuss the issues of my positionality as a female Vietnamese researcher conducting interviews with Vietnamese veterans, the reliability of memory and retrospective interviews, and social relations in the Vietnamese cultural context.

Chapter 4 presents the cultural and political backdrop against which Vietnamese guerrilla groups started recruiting their fighters. I explain how communist ideology has gradually merged with on one of the main social forces that guided the behaviour of the peasants and the elites – Confucianism. I explain that while Confucianism had arrived as a consequence of Chinese colonisation, it gradually became appropriated by the Vietnamese rulers and spread to the masses. I elaborate on some of the core virtues which are necessary to understand in order to interpret subsequent actions by my interviewees, such as the notions of filial piety, ties to one's village, and collectivism. I then show how the Vietnamese guerrillas took these core societal values and transformed them to echo the revolutionary sentiments, thus bringing the struggle close to the Vietnamese peasants – something the American forces failed to do. I then elaborate on what it was like to be born and grow up as a child in mid-20th century Vietnam, and in particular how the intersection of Confucianism, insurgencies, and communism, shaped the notion of 'good' Vietnamese childhood at the time.

The next chapters present analyses of my empirical data. Chapter 5 starts by exploring children's lives prior to joining the guerrillas. It focuses not only on the personal motivations that my interviewees identified as their primary drivers to take up arms, but also in the societal and political factors that enabled child soldiering to become a conceivable option for them. I will argue that to understand children's motivations, it is necessary to understand how the cultural and social practices, e.g. child labour and filial piety, can act as powerful political motivators. I will further argue that while many of my interviewees insisted that their motivations were non-political, their

evocations of issues of justice and equality imply that there were politics at play. In doing so, I demonstrate that children, even if they do not articulate their motivations in terms of 'high-politics', are still embedded in the political landscape surrounding them.

Chapter 6 discusses the experiences of my interviewees as they worked alongside guerrillas. I focus on the intersection between cultural practices of childhood and communist guerrilla group structures. I demonstrate that these wider political and cultural frameworks affected children's work, duties, and identity formation. I further argue that children quickly adapted to their new situation and learned to appropriate many new rules and norms associated with guerrilla life, thus displaying proactiveness and creativity despite very limiting circumstances. Nevertheless, even with the space for creativity and independence they were given, children were still confined by the expectations of the strict Confucian hierarchy, and therefore were never completely free, autonomous agents. This is particularly relevant to girls, who had to endure an additional layer of structural violence in the military conflicts.

Chapter 7 analyses the lives of my interviewees once the wars ended. This chapter shows that for many former child soldiers, 'reintegration' into their civilian lives was a fairly seamless, almost mundane, process. Much of this is due to the nature of children's participation in guerrilla warfare in Vietnam, which did not require many of them to leave their homes and villages. Even the children that had to leave their home villages were never completely isolated from wider society – again, by nature of the 'people's war' the guerrillas were carrying out, most fighters were tightly integrated with the lives of other villagers and peasants. Nevertheless, life in post-war Vietnam was still characterised by many hardships and disappointments, as the country was left in ruins and had to rebuild its political and economic life. My interviewees, as former guerrillas, however, still had many advantages in adapting to these hardships. For example, they were already familiar with the communist policies due to the intense political lessons they were exposed to while working for the guerrilla movement; they cultivated formal and informal networks to help each other financially and psychologically; and they further received some priorities in employment and education. Altogether, then, this made the reintegration of former Viet Cong child soldiers much easier than those of their counterparts (veterans who had served the Government of Vietnam).

In the concluding chapter, I draw two main conclusions with regard to my empirical and theoretical findings. Empirically, this is a case study that uncovers the experiences of child soldiers in a setting (Vietnam between 1955–1975) where underage combatants are under-studied. I demonstrate that within this specific setting, Confucianism became intertwined with

communism and the ongoing militarisation of everyday life. This combination affected the social and cultural practices associated with 'good' childhood, which manifested themselves in the motivations and the modes children chose to express their dissatisfaction with the American regime. Conceptually, I am contributing to our understanding of child soldiering as a socially-conditioned phenomenon. Specifically, my discussion highlights how we need to understand the experiences of child soldiers as shaped by context-specific sociocultural frameworks and political ideologies. An understanding of this influence is needed to grasp the 'making' and subsequently, the 'unmaking' of child soldiers.

Chapter 1: Literature review

1.1. Introduction

This literature review will consider the current debates in research surrounding child soldiers in general and child soldiers in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in particular. As noted by Beier (2020, p. 3), children are 'seldom framed as political subjects in their own right' within narratives of global politics, making 'fleeting cameo-like appearances in IR textbooks'. Nevertheless, there is growing recognition of the role of children in the international arena. It is therefore important to examine how children are already present in narratives surrounding conflict, and how their presence is understood and conceptualised. To this end, the chapter is divided into several sections, which are organised as follows.

Firstly, I will consider debates surrounding the idea of children's agency. I will begin with summarising the 'humanitarian' or 'caretaker' view of child soldiering. Within this view, children who participate in spaces traditionally reserved for adults, are seen as a priori victims. Child soldiers, therefore, are presumed to be objects of adult culpability – always passive, traumatised, and silently suffering. Drawing on various sources, I argue that this narrative has a range of negative consequences, including reducing complex conflicts to a caricature and ignoring other perceptions of childhood. In turn, it results in ineffective reintegration programmes. The next section focuses on the 'agency' narrative, which has been used to replace the victim-centric perspective. Authors who adopt this stance point out that children often display instances of rationality, proactiveness, and therefore their experiences need to be understood as being far more complex than that of merely victimhood. However, this approach has similarly faced criticisms, particularly that it is often used as a 'safe' argument (Thomas, 2016). More recent debates have stressed the need to take into account both structural and individual motivations for child soldiering. In other words, we need to conceive of possibilities of children being located in-between or beyond the victim vs. perpetrator binary. Given that I focus on investigating the importance of social forces, structures, and environments in shaping child soldier experience, this is the strand of literature within which I position my own research.

The last section of this review focuses specifically on research on child soldiering in Indochina. I review trends presented in this literature, and evaluate the theoretical discussion that has taken place so far. I demonstrate that, similar to the literature on child soldiering in other geographical contexts, research on young combatants in Indochina has sought to move away from viewing

children as passive victims or active agents; in more recent years, there have been attempts to conceptualise child soldiers as complicated social actors, who are deeply embedded in their surrounding environment. Nevertheless, the literature that is most fruitful in this regard focuses on children who worked under the Khmer Rouge and the Pathet Lao, while the research on Vietnamese child soldiers is still quite scarce. Further, even with the literature that does exist, there is still much space for further investigation, especially in comparison to the amount and depth of literature on child soldiering in the African continent. The insights I draw from the literature review are particularly helpful when devising my own methodological and theoretical approach, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

1.2. Child soldiers' agency: main debates

1.2.1 Humanitarian narrative

This section focuses on the debates surrounding children's agency, with the focus on what Rosen (2015) calls the 'humanitarian' approach, which is particularly prominent among NGOs, humanitarian agencies, and donors. Huynh (2015) labels this approach as the 'caretaker' approach. This position views childhood as a time exclusively for innocence and play, separate from adulthood. Children are seen as irrational and in need of guidance from adults. Perceived to be fundamentally different from adults, they are also presumed to share the same interests and desires regardless of their background (Fernando, 2001).

These assumptions are based on Piaget's works on the cognitive development of children. Here, the child is studied throughout a series of stages of cognitive development, until they reach an 'adult' mark – a state of competency and logical rationality[2]. As James and Prout (1997, p. 11) note, the idea of the 'universal' child is present throughout his writings – '"the child" as the bodily manifestation of cognitive development from infancy to adulthood can represent all children'.

Serving in the military is therefore seen as an inherent contradiction to 'normal' childhood. Indeed, Huynh (2015) notes that the assumptions of the caretaker view underlie many legal and humanitarian efforts. This observation is echoed by Martins (2013, p. 4), who conducted an

---

[2] See, for example, Piaget, 1964 for the 6 stages of child's development

analysis on European and American websites on child soldiering and found the following recurring patterns:

> 1. the use of quotes, attributed to child-soldiers, which generally express a plea for help and protection in the name of "all children", or describe some of the endured atrocities; 2. a general characterization, which invariably includes: forced recruitment or abduction; being forced to kill or slaughter; most often a member of the family; being witness to extreme acts of violence, especially against other children; being the object of humiliation, brutal beatings, rape or sexual slavery, slave labour, and hunger; and unprepared involvement in combat, with all the risks attached to combat situations, including severe injury and death. Generally, the characterization ends with the statement that all these children want peace and the chance to go back to school or to a "lost childhood".

Similar sentiments are echoed in a number of international legal instruments – for example, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child defines children's rights across the world as an 'abstract, universal given' (Fernando, 2001, p. 18). Tabak (2020) has conducted a particularly insightful analysis of prominent legal documents such as the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children (1990), the Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child, among others. Within these documents, she notes, there is an emphasis on preserving children's innocence, vulnerability, and immaturity; yet, these documents outline a world *fit for* children, but not *constructed by* children. In critiquing such a construction, Tabak (2020, p. 25) points out that children become an 'utterly disempowered' group, to be controlled, segregated, and disciplined; doing so, however, is portrayed to be 'in their best interest'. What these 'interests' are, and how they differ from child to child is generally presumed to be, again, the job of adults to know.

This view is not limited to legal and humanitarian instruments. Some literature on child soldiering contains sentimental and sensational language, highlighting the supposed unchildlike traits of child soldiers. One example is Romeo Dallaire's book *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children*. For Dallaire (2010, p. 4), a child soldier is no longer a 'child', but 'some other type of being'. The description of childhood as something fixed in time and universal across all cultures, as seen in the following paragraph, is also demonstrative of the popular image of child soldiers (Dallaire, 2010, p. 4; emphasis added):

> Young children are walking the earth right now with no sense of youth, of imaginary worlds, of joy, of love, of human warmth. They are not truly children in any definition except biological. But of course they are children, are they not? Have conflict, abject poverty, and

abandonment mutated them into some other type of being that is neither child nor adult? A category of their own that does not fit any description of what civilisations over the millennia have called a child?

This view of child soldiers contrasts the innocence and purity of the traditional view of the child with the supposed destruction of child soldiers. Further examples include:

More chilling than the weapon he held was what he wore on his back: a pink teddy-bear backpack, a telling symbol of his lost youth. (Briggs, 2009).

As you stare at him, you picture yourself in a flash, aged ten, playing war games in the woods. For a split second, you are transported to the world of childhood, with its make-believe, its wonder, its potential'. (Dallaire, 2010, p. 1).

The phenomenon of child soldiering itself is described with words such as 'unimaginable', 'impossible', and 'ruthless'. (Dallaire, 2010; Briggs, 2009). Beier (2011) and Watson (2011) observe similar themes in the academic literature; Beier (2011, p. 8) notes increasing anxieties about a "youth bulge" in academic texts, while Watson (2011, p. 2011, p. 54) critiques the tendency of academic discourses to concentrate on issues of education and rehabilitation because they 'are necessarily focused on the future of youth, rather than upon the instability, or indeed the positive impact, that a large youth population may potentially bring to the present'.

The next sub-sections elaborate more on the assumptions which underpin the caretaker view of child soldiers. Two particular threads emerge: looking for culprits to blame for the phenomenon (most often adults) and insisting that trauma is the default response to child soldiering. The next sections will look deeper into these articulations.

1.2.1.1 Adults as culprits

A prevalent consensus in the majority of humanitarian literature is that child soldiers are by definition always victims, 'regardless of how children are recruited and of their roles' (Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, n.d). This assumption is particularly prevalent with respect to recruitment. For example, Barstad (2009, p. 144) suggests that there can never be true voluntary recruitment and calls it a 'so-called voluntary' recruitment instead. This is because children are seen as having been forced by their 'economic, social, cultural, and political pressures into "volunteering" instead of exercising the "free choice" of adult soldiers' (Rosen, 2005, p. 134).

For example, if military life can provide children with clothes, shelter and food, children will enlist primarily for reasons of safety and to escape poverty, rather than from a genuine desire to serve in the conflict. Even in cases when there was no economic need to enlist, children are seen as not being able to make a voluntary choice because they are supposedly a priori 'emotional or irrational decision makers' (Rosen, 2005, p. 134). Machel (2001, p. 11) describes, for example, how children are easily lured into the prestige of military life and 'sense of power associated with carrying deadly weapons'. Dallaire (2010, p. 3) takes this argument further, suggesting that children in situations of conflict are desperate and thus are especially easy to manipulate through 'drugs and indoctrination'. Further, they could not have possibly developed a real sense of justice yet. This point is also reinforced by humanitarian agencies such as Save the Children (as cited in Lee, 2009): 'Although children may come forward to join an armed group without conscription or press-ganging, this type of recruitment is rarely truly voluntary. Children may have no other option for survival in a conflict'. Rosen (2005, p. 134) further sums up the portrayal of children within this strand of literature: 'Children only believe, or feel, or sense. They do not know, understand, judge, or decide'.

In other words, child soldiering is seen as a problem created solely by adults (and thus must be eradicated by adults only) (Machel, 2001; UNICEF, n.d.). The first way in which this literature operates is to directly blame the military groups for recruiting children. This results in describing the military groups such as Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) as 'grotesque, zombie-like militia' (Hitchens, 2011). The second tendency is to blame society for creating conditions where child soldiering is possible – for example, Dallaire (2010, p. 3) describes that the 'capacity for barbarism has made the child soldier the weapon of choice in over thirty conflicts around the world…'.

There is, then, an underlying assumption that a child soldier is by default a passive actor reflecting the adults' will. The image of the forced, drugged, and abused child is the most prevalent in the media – for example, some imagery in the KONY campaign (analysed by Beier, 2015), or the Human Rights Watch reports which use headlines such as 'Coercion and Intimidation of Child Soldiers to Participate in Violence' (Human Rights Watch, 2008). The image of an African juvenile boy, who has been kidnapped and taken away from home is popular in charities' campaigns as well as media portrayals of child soldiers (Brocklehurst, 2015). What they obscure, however, is the complex nature of social and political forces which enable such a conflict to take place, and how the children's desires align with or contradict such social forces. They ask for Western donors, militaries, leaders to 'save' them – without reflecting on how the West has indeed contributed to the conflicts within which they are now operating.

1.2.1.2 Trauma approach

For NGOs, donors, and humanitarian organisations, treating trauma for child soldiers is often the key priority. Thus, much of this literature also adopts a 'trauma' approach to child soldiers. The approach suggests that any diversion from the classical innocence model of childhood must be necessarily traumatic for children. This assumption can be seen in the following quotes:

> Children forced into combat often return years later with severe psychological trauma, struggling to reintegrate themselves into the families and communities from which they were taken.

> Many are left with physical, psychological, and behavioral problems, including nightmares, flashbacks, extreme fear, grief and guilt, depression, and suicidal ideation – further barriers to their successful rehabilitation and reintegration into community life. (Both quotes are from Prevention Action, 2012)

As Wessells (2006, p. 134) notes, a feature of this approach is that, being based on a medical model, they 'emphasise child soldiers' deficits, portraying children as suffering from a pathology that can have lifelong impacts'. As a result, former child soldiers are stigmatised and assumed to be dangerous for society – see Marshall's (2014, p. 281) observation that 'humanitarian aid projects presume that the default response to violence is trauma, and that trauma left untreated will lead to aggression and violence'.

1.2.2 Criticism of trauma-related and universal view of childhood

There are, however, critics who view the humanitarian approach as problematic and therefore have launched some criticisms against it: firstly, showing that it conflicts with empirical evidence, and secondly stating that there are many alternative ways to view childhood which contradict the supposed universality of the idea of an innocent, romanticised child. The next sections explore these criticisms in more detail.

1.2.2.1 Contradicting evidence

For Rosen (2019, p. 163), 'the gap between empirical description and humanitarian advocacy is vast'. He states that while humanitarian workers often frame child soldiering as a matter of robbed childhood innocence by adults, 'virtually no ethnographers or other on-the-ground observers of war zones would agree that the issue of child soldiers can be reduced solely to adults abusing and terrifying innocent children into committing violent acts'. As an example, he suggests that forced recruitment is only one possible mode of recruitment – yet it is the one that has been dominant in the humanitarian narratives around child soldiers. It is true that within many military groups such as the LRA, there is a high level of abductions – however, even within such groups, the children's experience varies greatly. Further, as Drumbl (2012a) and Schmidt (2007) state, most child soldiers are not drugged or forced into the army. According to Drumbl (2012b, p. 482), 'approximately two-thirds of child soldiers exercise some (at times considerable) initiative in coming forward to enroll'. The problem arises when the cases of abduction and forced recruitment are considered as the only types of recruitment, or in viewing all types of child soldier recruitment as forced recruitment. In this sense, 'the child soldier who volunteers is conflated with the child soldier who is kidnapped; the teenager is conflated with the vulnerable toddler' (Rosen, 2015, p.176), as all motivations are merged into one. Drumbl (2012b) further insists that it would be counter-productive to ignore children's motivations in joining military groups.

As Beier (2015) pointed out, however, children's agency is often either overshadowed or demonised. When children do exercise agency, such as making a decision to join combat, 'they are no longer viewed as a victim worthy of assistance, but rather are seen as a dangerous delinquent, because they have moved outside the conception of the innocent child' (Berents, 2009, n.p.). In addition, despite the stereotypes, most child soldiers are not prepubescent boys – in fact, many are adolescents about 15–16 years old (Drumbl, 2012). Many children also enjoyed serving in military groups – for example, in Sierra Leone, once the conflict was over, some children looked for ways to join them again (Denov, 2010). Some research studies report that participating in military conflicts gave the children a feeling of power and agency lacking in non-military communities – this is especially true for girls who appreciated that in the army, unlike in civilian life, they were considered equal to boys (Denov, 2010, Steinl, 2017). This subverts the idea of helpless, passive child soldiers, instead suggesting that there are alternative experiences of child soldiering.

Furthermore, the humanitarian narratives do not always align with how child soldiers think of themselves – many do not feel that they are traumatised in the first place. Ismael Beah (2007), a former child soldier, recounts: the nurses and social workers kept telling him that none of what

happened was his fault. At first, he was annoyed, but as it was repeated over and over, with time he came to believe it. Lastly, child soldiers are not 'rescued by humanitarians – in particular, Western humanitarians – or by anyone for that matter' (Drumbl, 2012b, p. 482). Indeed, according to Drumbl's research, most child soldiers try to initiate their own escape. These findings question the extent to which children are fully dependent on the will of adults.

The trauma approach has also been criticised. While, as Rosen (2007, p. 299) points out, there is 'no reason to believe that children are immune to the battlefield traumas that have affected adult combatants in all wars', there are several problems with it becoming a generic archetype for all child soldiers. The trauma approach implies that all child soldiers are always damaged by their experience – thus moving them to the category of 'victim'. As Wessells (2016) notes, when children see themselves as victims, they act accordingly, conforming to the expectations of a passive and a hopeless child. This might actually slow their recovery: 'One of the keys to overcoming trauma is to regain one's sense of control, which would be a difficult prospect for children who have a victim's mindset or believe they are irreparably damaged'. (Wessells, 2016, p. 134).

While not denying the psychological effects of political violence on children, Marshall (2014, p. 282) reminds us that trauma 'is the construct of particular medical and humanitarian aid knowledge/practices and as such is a contested political discourse'. More specifically, it can often be used to depoliticise political violence, reducing complex struggles and various interpretations of violence – which also include resilience and survival – to a set of medical symptoms, and an 'individual struggle for self-esteem' (Marshall, 2014, p. 283). There are two further challenges to this view: firstly, Wessells (2006, p. 135) questions whether the idea of the trauma approach is used out of genuine concern for children's state of mental health, or because of the 'hidden power dynamics of humanitarian assistance', i.e., to reinforce an image of a suffering distant other and thus attract more funds from Western donors. Marshall echoes similar concerns, but also places these narratives in the context of a broader desire to keep children affected by political violence (in this case, Palestinian children) in check, as governable subjects. Marshall (2014, p. 183) states: 'In this way, trauma can be understood as a spatial strategy attempting to keep unruly subjects in their place, confining children to the apolitical and non-threatening realm of childhood innocence'.

It can be seen, then, that despite claims that child soldiers are necessarily traumatised, forcibly conscripted and in need of help from the Western experts, empirical evidence suggests that the child soldier experience is much more diverse and nuanced, and often contradicts this depiction.

The simplification leads to unsuccessful reintegration programmes which do not take into account the experience of children who may not conform to the expectations of a ruined childhood. For example, former child soldiers in Sierra Leone have 'expressed feelings of frustration that their participation and involvement in the conflict counted for nothing once they had ceased being combatants', and that an absence of opportunities and platforms for self-expression led them to join gangs (Berents, 2009, n.p.). These experiences and motivations are just as valid and also need to be explored.

1.2.2.2 Contested universality of childhood

Another criticism of the humanitarian narrative is that it portrays childhood as a universal category of being. The cited paragraphs written by writers such as Dallaire or Briggs are examples of this: they assert that childhood has been the same for millennia across civilisations; linking their experience of childhood with a child from a completely different culture; and implying that the phenomenon of child soldiering in one country is going to affect the entire next generation.

Yet, childhood is a culture-specific notion. The assumption that a child is 'the adult in the making', the 'citizen of tomorrow', as Moynagh (2013, p. 659) points out, is 'hardly universal'. This 'conceptualization of the child as a potentiality rather than an actuality' (Castaneda, 2002, p. 1), is rooted in the 19th century and required the separation of private and public realms in society. The dominant notion since then has been that childhood belongs primarily to the private realm of the family; it must be protected from the outside world. This is when childhood started to be associated with innocence, purity, and play. As Wyness (2006, p. 26) puts it, the modern idea of childhood, or the idea that children are subordinates to adults, is 'basically a very powerful adult myth'. Moynagh (2013), characterises it as part of a liberal political discourse, to which the child soldier poses a threat. A child who is aware of violence and politics is typically considered to be an 'adult', and 'provokes anxiety and elicits a defensive reassertion of the Romantic view of childhood' (Moynagh, 2013, p. 664). With respect to child soldiers, it presumes that they have an urgent desire to get back the innocence they supposedly lost.

Rosen (2019) further compares the humanitarian idea of a child soldier and the definition of childhood in fields such as anthropology and history. He states that in contrast to the humanitarian idea of childhood, the academic fields 'take as their central orientation the idea that there are a multiplicity of concepts of childhood and adulthood, each contextualised by age, ethnicity, gender, history, location and numerous other factors' (Rosen, 2019, p. 162). He further reminds the reader

that 'the term "child soldier" was not created by historians or social scientists as a guide to empirical research and analysis. Rather, it is a legal and moral concept created by humanitarian and human rights organizations […] to help secure a set of normative goals' (Rosen, 2019, p. 171; emphasis added).

Indeed, there is evidence that societies can have different understandings of childhood and family. For example, questioning the idea that children should not work, Gates (2011, p. 33) suggests that 'throughout the world, children tend to enter the labour market at an earlier age than is accepted in the West' and cites an example of Indian boys who start working at the age of 12–14. Observing the practice of child soldiering in Sierra Leone, Shepler (2014, p. 32) suggests that many child soldiers were involved in doing 'standard', to that culture, tasks, including cooking and cleaning. When they did more 'soldierly' things, there was a framework within which it 'made sense for children to work alongside adults' (Shepler, 2014, p. 32). In this sense, Shepler challenges Hitchens' or Dallaire's descriptions of societies where child soldiering takes place as grotesque and barbaric.

Another example of cultural differences regarding ideas of family and childhood can be demonstrated in issues such as child soldier reintegration. Because of the assumption that the child supposedly needs to be protected, caretaker narratives imply that reintegration is a 'natural obligation of families' (Martins, 2013). They, however, ignore the fact that these families may not want to help the child reintegrate. The concept of childhood in these families may be different from that enforced by the humanitarian narrative. For example, unlike the Western conception, it may include assumptions that the child has some degree of responsibility and accountability. They may also have differing ideas of the role of family in a child's protection. For example, as Shepler (2014, p. 37) suggests, unlike the Western view that the child should always live with their own nuclear family, 'the particular trauma of being removed from the care of one's biological mother and father does not exist in the same way in Sierra Leone […] since so many children are sent to live with other families without their mother and father'.

Overall, then, we can see that the evidence about the local understandings of child soldiers, as well as the perceptions of children themselves contradicts the humanitarian narratives. As Rosen (2019, p. 16) sums it up: it is assumed that children fight because 'they have been kidnapped, brainwashed, physically and sexually abused or forced to ingest alcohol or drugs'; yet the evidence presents children 'who apply their own intelligence, strategize about situations and otherwise act in ways that make it hard to differentiate them from ordinary soldiers'. This insight

has led to an alternative view of child soldiers – the agency narrative, which the next section will focus on.

1.3. Agency narrative as an alternative to the humanitarian view of childhood

This section examines an alternative narrative which emerged as a direct response to the approach which victimises children – in particular, children in war. Writers such as Podder (2011, p. 146) suggest that although it is true that children can be seen as victims in war, 'war victimises everyone'. Similarly, Lee-Koo (2015) confirms that 'there is no escaping' the notion that children are victims of conflict, like all civilians. What needs to be underlined, however, is that their experiences are also very complex and do not always fit under the 'victim' label. Children can be traumatised by violence, but they also display impressive amounts of resilience to hardships. They can be affected by ongoing wars, but they can also play an important role in affecting wars' outcomes. They can display empathy and care for each other, thus contradicting the common representation of child soldiers as 'killing machines'. In other words, as Lee-Koo (2015, p. 2) states:

> Increasingly, it is becoming apparent that children have much to teach us. They should thus be recognised as actors who contribute in positive, less than positive, sometimes unique and enlightening ways to conflict, peace and security. Like everyone else, they should not be silenced or ignored.

The concept of agency is an alternative to the 'victim' representation of the child. One of the earliest summaries of the 'emergent paradigm' of recognising children in their own right was developed by James and Prout (1997, p. 8); they identified 6 factors, among which 3 and 4 are the most relevant to the agency narratives:

> 3. Children's social relationships and cultures are worthy of study in their own right, independent of the perspective and concerns of adults.

> 4. Children are and must be seen as active in the construction and determination of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live. Children are not just the passive subjects of social structures and processes.

In summary, this approach 're-examines "natural" boundaries and dimensions of childhood, constructs children as agents of their own identity and not solely subject to 'adults' representation' (Berents, 2009, n.p.). This paradigm has been supported by other scholars – for example Hardman (1973, p. 87) describes children as actors in 'their own right and not just as receptacles of adult teaching'. Mayall (2002, p. 21) similarly suggests that children's actions can be seen as autonomous and enough to make a difference in a 'relationship, a decision, to the workings of a set of social assumptions or constraints'.

The agency narrative, then, challenged the passive, 'in-need-of-protection-child' representation. There are several ways in which this approach manifests itself in the narratives around child soldiers. The next sections examine specifically how agency has been studied in the context of recruitment and children navigating the terrain of war.

1.3.1 Children's choice during recruitment

As we have seen, according to the 'humanitarian' or 'caretaker' viewpoint, children's participation in combat is seen as involuntary, regardless of circumstances. This is not the case for the alternative position. Denov (2010), for example, argues that while it is important to address structural issues which can potentially make the children's choice 'involuntary' (the proliferation of small arms, failed state), it is problematic to assume they automatically predispose children to resort to violence because it 'robs people of essential characteristics as human beings and regards them as mere "effects" of the encompassing structure'. Denov investigated the actions of child soldiers in Sierra Leone. Her study concluded that 'children are possessed with agency, frequently acting with an awareness of the meaning and consequences of their actions'. In contrast to the humanitarian narrative, Denov (2010) considers these children to be rational human actors. Peters and Richards (1998) have also conducted interviews with child soldiers in Sierra Leone and confirmed that despite the widespread stereotype, many children chose to fight 'with their eyes open', understood the politics of the war fully, and were ready to defend and be proud of their choice.

A number of scholars including Rosen (2007), Utas (2003) who interviewed child soldiers in Liberia, Blattman and Annan (2008) who worked with child combatants in Northern Uganda, and Cortes and Buchanan (2007) with insights from child soldiers in Colombia, similarly shift the narrative from the 'victim' lens to agent-centric research. The latter, in particular, demonstrated child soldiers' agency by discussing how they did not 'succumb to the psychological domination

of the leaders of the group' (Cortes & Buchanan, 2007, p. 47). On the contrary, the child soldiers made an autonomous decision to join the army and made a conscious effort to carve out an area of their life which they could control. The conclusion made throughout studies such as these, which interviewed children themselves, was that children have agency and can act rationally and independently, and do not always fit the romanticised picture of the vulnerable, innocent child. Such sentiments are confirmed by scholars such as Rosen (2015), who argue that children still exercise agency and rationality when choosing between fighting and death (in choosing not to die, their choice is rational). The agency narrative, then, 'highlights the contingency of dominant definitions of "child" and "childhood" and the inadequacy of the Western universalistic conception in many situations' (Berents, 2009, n.p.).

An alternative to the predominant humanitarian view of why child soldiers enlist in military groups is suggested by Podder. While asserting that there is nothing new about children participating in military conflict, Podder (2011, p. 151; emphasis added) suggests that 'Child soldiering is always a choice, for some it's an optimal choice amidst structural compulsions, for some it's an exercise in tactical agency and a tool for survival'. Podder argues forcefully that this theme needs to be 'mainstreamed into humanitarian understanding' (2011, p. 151). This approach contrasts strongly with the caretaker viewpoint of child soldiers' choices. It suggests that even in cases of coercive recruitment, serving under the threat of death, the children made a choice as active agents.

A substantial body of literature has sought to produce nuanced conceptualisations of agency. This has led some scholars to define specifically what *children's* agency is. The most common definition uses Gidden's (as cited in Berents, 2009) concept of agency – 'the ability, not only the intention, to do something'. Defined in this way, 'agency is intimately connected to power; the agent must be able to exercise "consequential control" over the situation' (Berents, 2009; Honwana, 2006). In this conceptualisation, agency is defined in the context of social interaction – despite their subordination, children can influence the actions of the superiors. This view of children acknowledges their power and agency, but still recognises the children's constrained circumstances, within which they have to work to achieve their goals (Berents, 2009).

Honwana's theoretical framework further elaborates on the idea of child soldiers' agency. Drawing on her experience with child soldiers in Angola and Mozambique, she evaluated their agency through their actions during military conflicts. Honwana (2006) also relies on Gidden's definition of agency as 'the *capability* of doing something rather than the *intention* of doing something (p. 69; emphasis added)'. She examines the decisions made by young combatants

and suggests that they could manifest a very specific kind of agency – tactical, 'thin' agency. Thin agency is defined as 'a type of resource that is devised to cope with and maximize the concrete, immediate circumstances of the military environment', i.e., the actions that children can take given the current circumstances (Honwana, 2005, p. 49). She suggests that during recruitment, children are not able to access it. In devising this theory, Honwana acknowledges both the social constraints within which children are recruited in a military group, and their ability to exercise agency.

The second type of agency is 'strategic', 'thick' agency, which includes actions taken with the long-term picture in mind (Honwana, 2006). While children may not be able to exercise it immediately during recruitment and combat, researchers have found empirical examples in post-conflict settings. There, we can see children building their lives and taking initiative in the post-conflict world – for example, in Uganda, former child soldiers developed agricultural projects and took care of stock and land (Lowicki & Emry, 2005). In Sierra Leone, youth started a bicycle cooperative, 'providing a needed transportation within the community' and maintaining their own livelihoods (Lowicki & Emry, 2005, p. 13). This is an example of a more strategy-based agency, because children consider their long-term future, while adjusting and responding to the constraints of the environment. These conceptions of children's agency are particularly important because they, once again, highlight that there is no uniform child soldier experience – rather, children's courses of action, decisions, and motivations always change in response to the political and social environment around them.

1.3.2 Navigating circumstances

Agency has also been conceptualised as a way of navigating the social terrain, not simply making proactive decisions. Research shows that child soldiers can – and do – use the knowledge and experience available to them to take control of their life. As Utas (2005) shows, girls use it for navigating the complex Liberian conflict zone, making decisions, and employing tactics such as girlfriending – choosing to be a girlfriend of someone who can protect them in the long-run, for example. In this context, girlfriending is also conceptualised it as a form of tactical agency.

In post conflict settings, a concept of 'victimcy' was developed to show how children use the prevailing image of a victimised child soldier for their own ends. Utas (2011), for example, recounts the story of a boy he met in Ganta, who narrated a story of his life as a child soldier in the National Patriotic Front of Liberia as a porter. The boy, however, soon admitted that he made

the story up and used it to get special treatment from international charities, such as participation in training programmes which were initially developed for ex-combatants. For Utas (2011, p. 219), 'Victimcy is clearly a form of social navigation; a navigator tool used by child soldiers as tactic responses to their socio-economic environment'. The reason why victimcy can be seen as a form of agency is because it requires 'expertise' in interpreting social expectations and being able to formulate stories that fit them – bearing in mind that the social expectations are also diverse. For example, in the case of children in Liberia, they display an 'impressive awareness' of the Western media and the humanitarian narratives around child soldiers (Utas, 2011).

Another case of children actively navigating circumstances has been described by Ahlness (2020), who has investigated post-war memories of children who lived through the Tajik civil war. As her interviews show, children use toys and play to navigate and understand conflict and post-conflict environments; in doing so, Ahlness demonstrates how, in their own way, children sought to make sense of the ongoing surroundings positively and productively. In the same issue of the *Childhood* journal, Malik (2020) similarly traces children's play as a way to be persistent and engaged social actors, rather than simple objects of violence and militarisation.

Overall, in combat and in post-conflict settings, children seek to ensure their own survival, education, and skills training. Berents (2009, n.p.) states that it is 'obvious' that children 'challenge the dominant discourse's understanding of children as passive, incomplete adults who are dependent, irrational beings'. She describes child soldiers as 'rationally and independently' looking to change their lives. Rosen (2005, p. 133) further confirms these sentiments, stating that 'children, even young ones, are far more sophisticated, knowledgeable, rational, and skillful than is assumed…' Cases such as Sierra Leone or the peace activism movement organised by Colombian children have shown that recognising children's agency also can help in reintegration and peace-building processes (Watson, 2008). As Berents (2009) pointed out: children engage with military conflict, both affecting and being affected by it. In this sense, they are agents who constantly negotiate their own position in the conflict.

1.4. Criticism of the 'agency' concept

It can be argued that the 'agency' perspectives represent the views of the children themselves better than the caretaker narrative. This approach does not silence them, works with children, provides a platform for self-expression, and acknowledges them as actors in their own right. As

demonstrated by earlier studies, it gives an alternative – and a more effective – way to engage in the Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration (DDR) programmes (Rivard, 2010). This perspective, however, is not without its critics. This section outlines the next turn in the debates on childhood – challenges which have questioned the extent to which the concept of agency can convey the experience of children.

The first criticism concerns the liberal use of the concept of agency itself. As Lancy (2012) notes, some authors explicitly state that they 'had no special theory in mind, except that children exercise agency – they knowingly act on their worlds to change those worlds' (Trawick 2007, as cited in Lancy, 2012). The concept became very widespread in childhood studies, leading scholars such as Tisdall and Punch (2012) to argue that it has almost become a 'mantra'. Such use of agency as a concept was also questioned by Thomas (2016) in the context of enslaved Black American women – however, many of her arguments are applicable here. Thomas (2016, p. 328) argues that when it comes to marginalised groups, the idea of agency had become a 'safe' argument, and understandably so: to contradict the idea of passive victimhood and instead to show their sympathy and acknowledgment of these groups as 'strong, resilient and enterprising'.

The second strand of criticism focuses on the Western-centric roots of the concept itself. As Madhok and Rai point out, an agent is assumed to be 'a subject who is rational, self-affirming, self-reliant, self-sufficient, responsible, and capable of authoring and executing her own actions' and 'free from sociological and structural constraints' (Madhok & Rai, 2012). Multiple historians of childhood have similarly expressed their dissatisfaction with the concept of agency: in their featured commentary post on the Society for the History of Children and Youth blog, Vallgårda, Alexander, and Olsen (2018) argue that the concept is problematic because it carries many assumptions from liberal Enlightenment thinking. The danger of making agency as an end argument, as Alexander (2016, p. 123) notes in another work, is that '…[i]t can flatten out differences across time and place, miss or minimize girls' actions and choices, and obscure the social relations and power imbalances that shape young people's lives'. In other words, while employing this concept with the goal of empowering previously silenced subjects is understandable, applying it in a way that is not mindful of social constraints or complicated power relationships risks obscuring and marginalising certain groups of children even further.

Indeed, studies have shown that in non-Western contexts there sometimes is resistance to the idea of the child as an agent: Latin American parents undergoing parental training were reported to be sceptical of the concept of 'a self–centred, individualistic child' – something that may be valued in the West, but not as much in other cultures (Lancy, 2012; Uttal, 2010). Similarly,

Dybdahl and Hundeide (1998) interviewed Somalian children and found that they explicitly rejected their agency and instead stressed the importance of parental authority. Their experiences, however, still need to be understood and analysed, even if they do not fit any of the current approaches – neither the sentimental, nor the agent-centric one.

The third strand of the criticisms concern the definition of 'agency' itself. As Cavazzoni (2021, p. 364) notes, agency has been described as a 'slippery' term, one which is not applicable in many circumstances. Maynes (2008, p. 117), for example, described the term frequently being associated with 'moments of political rebellion or heroic action in the public sphere'. Gleason (2016) problematised it further, pointing out that agency, in the context of children and youth, is often associated with rebellion and resistance. She raises the following question, then:

> What about those children who do not appear to exercise agency or whose voices we cannot hear no matter how hard we listen – do their histories 'count' in the same way? As we have linked children's agency with their voices, and often in (counter-)distinction to those of adults, what would it mean for us to write histories of children's compliance with adult dictates from their own perspectives? What did it mean for children themselves to meet the approval of adults? Did this constitute a kind of agency on the part of children and youth? (Gleason, 2016, p. 457)

Alexander (2016) similarly asks whether being obedient is a form of agency, or whether it can be a lesser form of agency. She further questions the usefulness of such a concept for studying, for example, girls participating in the Girl Guide movement in the 1920s, which 'focused on conservative visions of motherhood and citizenship during a time of rapid social and cultural change' (Alexander, 2016, p. 122). Girls acted from positions of marginality and invisibility, and frequently participated in the movement without complaints and rebellion – how, then, is their agency to be understood?

Overall, then, there is a need to consider and engage with children's stories even if they do not behave in a rational, empowered, typically 'agentic' way. Otherwise, as Gleason further points out, researchers risk only engaging with children when they act as adults. Doing so again falls into the trap of conceptualising childhood as a temporal stage – children, then, are 'citizens in waiting', who will soon become more desirable actors in the international arena – adults. This approach, in turn, does not engage with childhood in its full complexity, therefore ignoring multiple layers of power relations underlying children's lives, social and cultural contexts which shape their decisions, and the relational nature of not just children, but all participants in military conflict.

Ignoring that, then, undermines children's significance for historical change, placing only those who conform to the predominant liberal understanding of agency at the forefront of academic enquiry, while bypassing the experiences of those who do not.

To escape the 'agency trap', Thomas (2016, p. 335) urges scholars that 'agency should not be the endpoint of our analyses', but the start. In doing so, she argues, researchers will be able to identify the multiple motivations behind a single action – those which may be unwise, irrational, and rooted in vague internalised preconceptions. Thomas (2016) argues that in turn, this will help scholars to learn more about the narratives of the victimhood, rather than dismiss it as irrelevant and a priori untrue.

It is possible that relying solely on structural factors such as poverty and violence to explain child soldering may evoke the previous representation of children as victims (see Denov's, 2010, critique of such approach above). However, considering the actions of the children without first examining the role of ideology, kinship, power relations in addition to the cognitive processes behind that choice would similarly present children as a monolith group, as Boyden (2007) argues. On the other hand, making agency the starting point will help to uncover various power relations and social forces underlying each course of action, thus historicising children, rather than divorcing them from their social and historical context. The environment which shapes their actions could be as diverse as schools, parents, the government and its ideologies, the books and magazines that children read, and their peers and classmates. There may be different factors which affect the children's decision to join.

Many scholars have gone beyond the 'agency' argument and have employed alternative ways to conceptualise children's activities and experiences. Indeed, the literature on this topic is still expanding and developing. An interesting proposition has been made by Alexander (2016, p. 123), who proposed a deeper engagement with the concept of 'emotion work': a type of labour that 'requires one to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others'. While it has been applied to analysis of paid labour, Alexander (2016, p. 124) argues that it is particularly appropriate to young people because it is expected that they perform the emotion work: they are, after all, considered 'economically worthless but emotionally priceless'. Yet, within this emotional work, there are also unequal power relations, cultural and gendered expectations which cannot be ignored. Along similar lines, Mischa Honeck proposed a German concept of 'eigen-sinn' as a way out of the agency trap. The concept was defined earlier by Ludtke (1995, p. 313) as 'willfulness, spontaneous self-will, a kind of self-affirmation, an act of (re)appropriating alienated social relations'. Honeck has applied this concept

to study youth organisations. Only in employing this concept, Honeck (2019, n.p.) argues, could the youth organisations be presented in such a way that 'take into account both their situational cooperation and their occasional breaking rank, not to mention the zeal and fanaticism which found their most extreme expression in the militant Hitler Youth or the orgies of violence of the Chinese Cultural Revolution'.

There are also a few studies which have taken the social and political contexts surrounding children particularly seriously, providing important insights into how childhood changes depending on cultural and historical context. For example, a particularly illuminating study has been carried out by Zack-Williams (2001). He traces how the Sierra Leone's transition to peripheral capitalism has 'ruptured social relations within the family' (Zack-Williams, 2001, p. 75). As he notes, the denial of welfare provision has placed additional burdens on the institution of family and therefore contributed to its uneven development. He contrasts it with 'capitalism of the centre where state sponsored institutions have increasingly encroached on and substituted for traditional functions of the family' (Zack-Williams, 2001, p. 76). The families in Sierra Leone responded to such a transition by developing a wardship system, i.e. fostering their children in wealthier families, sometimes non-related. The disadvantage of such a system is the exploitative relationship between children and their foster families, which led many children to escape to the streets. Simultaneously, it normalises early parting with one's family, making the particular trauma of separating from children's biological parents not entirely unique to child soldiers. It is within this context that one needs to understand why many children joined.

Scholars such as Kurochenko (2011) or Özerdem, Podder, and Quitoriano (2010) similarly point to how specific understandings of childhood changed under the influence of predominant political ideology. Kurochenko (2001, p. 28), for example, demonstrates how political indoctrination would 'help Soviet children to develop into nascent patriots who would see themselves as part of the larger revolutionary project, surrender their individuality […] to the motherland, and prepare themselves to defend their country's national interests'. The Stalinist regime, she argues, has predisposed children's willingness to fight in the World War 2, thus leading 60,000 – 300,000 children to join the fighting ranks against Nazi Germany. Özerdem, Podder, and Quitoriano (2010, p.313), on the other hand, found that 'economic motivations were practically non-existent' for child soldiers in their study, and that children were guided by their duty to family and community, which have normalised participation in military conflict. Both studies emphasise that children were active agents in participating in their respective military struggles,

but at the same time draw our attention to the importance of wider political and social contexts surrounding the children.

While multiple 'ways out' of the agency trap are being proposed, perhaps the most common framework is the relational one. Within this framework, agency and structure are seen as mutually co-constitutive of each other. An interesting example is presented by Cavazzoni, et. al (2021), who interviewed Palestinian children on their experiences with political violence. Much like the scholars who criticised the caretaker narrative, the authors challenged the idea of children as helpless victims, rather defining them as active agents who make use of social, physical, and political resources available to them. However, like scholars who criticise the 'agency' argument, Cavazzoni et. al (2021) still aimed to investigate how children exercise agency within different social structures – those that constrain, shape, or enable their experience. To do so, their study 'was informed by socio-ecological theories, in order to take into account the micro-, as well as miso- and macro-, factors operating within children's lived environment' (Cavazzoni, et. al, 2021, p. 366). They found that it was beneficial to acknowledge the 'complementary role of structure and agency', since it helped them to show that young people were able to exercise agency even in highly constrained social fields.

Gleason (2016, p. 457) further argues that 'approaching questions of agency as *relational and contextual* enables historians to move beyond binaried and undifferentiated approaches towards a more fruitful exploration of *how* the social construction of age and social relations of power propelled change over time'. Thinking 'relationally' about children manifests differently depending on the researchers' aims: for example, Huijsmans (2016, p. 146) defined it as 'situating mobile children and youth in relation to households and communities, and viewing them as social actors implicated in, yet also contributing to, processes of social change'. On the other hand, Kallio (2015) also takes into account the spatial dimension, but her argument is similar to that of Huijsmans: children make sense, transform, and create the worlds around them, interacting with them while also being shaped and constrained by them.

This thesis adopts a relational approach. I will explain further why this approach is the most appropriate in the next chapter, which outlines my methodological tools and theoretical framework. The literature that I align with contests the idea of children as passive victims, but also questions the notion of them being rational agents. Instead, I argue, they are neither: like all social actors, they are simultaneously constrained and are capable of transforming structures around them. Acknowledging these constraints does not automatically label children as victims – there

are still many 'in-betweens'. It is thus more fruitful to address the experiences of child soldiers as interactions between different agents, environmental factors, and complex internalised attitudes.

1.5. Child soldiering in 20th century Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos

As I have mentioned in the introduction, there is limited academic research on child soldiering in Asia, especially when compared to the literature on child soldiering in Africa. Most existing literature covers child soldiering in Myanmar, with a few mentions of other instances of child soldiers – Thai border or Philippines (For example, in Kampan & Tanielian, 2014; Child Soldiers International, 2015). Even less is written about child soldiering in Southeast Asia, and specifically the 20th century Vietnam and its neighbouring countries. In this section, I will elaborate on the existing literature which covers the phenomenon of child soldiering in the 20th century Vietnam, as well as Cambodia and Laos. While this thesis focuses on the Vietnamese case, as I will show below, existing studies do not engage with many cultural and political practices which shaped predisposition and experiences of Vietnamese child soldiering; these missing insights, however, have been covered in more detailed in the literature on child soldiering in the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia and Pathet Lao in Laos. This is because the three countries have shared very similar histories with regards to French occupation (all three comprising French Indochina until the 20th century), conflict with the US, and encounters with communism. While the case of the three groups are not identical, the insights from the literature can still be useful in helping me shape my own thinking about how militarisation and communist ideology in Vietnam intertwined with existing social and cultural practices. To this end, I summarise the empirical findings and theoretical debates which currently underpin research on child soldiering not only in 20th century Vietnam, but also Laos and Cambodia.

1.5.1 Vietnam

The academic literature on Vietnamese child soldiers is scarce. Children and youth sometimes appear in dedicated chapters within books that focus on women – for example, Taylor's (1999) chapter titled 'Youth at war' in *Vietnamese Women at war* or Stur's (2011) analysis of weaponizing the child as a propaganda tool in *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam War Era*. Neither work, however, aims to situate their texts in the debate surrounding child soldiers' agency and victimhood; rather, they offer descriptive and informative accounts on how youth was used as a weapon in the conflicts. Taylor's work, for example, is enlightening with regards to the specific

tasks which children carried out, and highlights that being a child soldier, quite often, went beyond combat duties. In the aforementioned chapter, she notes that young girls performed essential tasks behind the lines: carrying heavy loads with food and weapons or gathering information on the location of the enemy (espionage, she notes, is one area in which children particularly excelled).

Several scholars, however, still offer interesting conceptualisations of Vietnamese child soldiering which go beyond passive victimhood. Hynd (2020, p. 685), for example, adopted a generational lens. Similar to many scholars mentioned previously, she argues that the recruitment of children should not automatically be presumed to be a consequence of the evil of adults, but should be taken in the context of 'wider mobilization of youth and the generational hierarchies that shaped independence struggles'. Employing such an approach has helped Hynd to demonstrate that children and youth are a legitimate category of analysis, with their own grievances, motivations, and set of experiences. A failure to understand local experiences of children, she argues, will hinder counterinsurgency responses.

An important and comprehensive overview of the Youth Shock Brigades organisation was offered by Guillemot (2009). Tracing the history and context of its establishment, Guillemot (2009, p. 30) argues that these youths were neither heroes nor exploited victims, but simply 'individuals absorbed by an inhuman human task'. The focus of Guillemot's study is the body – as feverish, hungry, and decaying, but also reconstructing and surviving. Guillemot (2009, p. 41) states that it is particularly important to pay attention to the body as a category of analysis because 'the books extolling the trail as a great victory are highly exaggerated. Nobody mentions the burned eyes, ruptured eardrums, or pieces of shrapnel encrusted in flesh'. Through utilising the body as a category of analysis, however, Guillemot allows the reader to not only gain insight into the role of young combatants in the war, but also gain a much closer understanding of the Youth Shock Brigades organisation – how it worked and how it was organised.

The third approach, proposed by Huynh (2015), emphasises the importance of engaging with cultural factors which predisposed children to volunteer to join guerrillas. Without engaging with culture, he argues, our understanding of the impact of conflict on children would be incomplete. In investigating the life of a former Viet Minh child soldier, Huynh finds that stories were a particularly important cultural element shaping his decisions. Citing that 'Vietnam is and always has been one of the most intensely literary civilisations on the face of the planet', he focuses his analysis on stories and legends about past fighters and martyrs which are an inseparable part of

Vietnamese culture (Huynh, 2015, p. 144). They were especially powerful because, as Huynh (2015, p. 156) argues: 'they encase in cultural amber a sense of national innocence and pride that is threatened by foreign aggression and protected by the sacrifices – violent if need be – of youth'.

They, in turn, inform Vietnamese youths that being passive is unacceptable when war is ongoing; this motif is extremely powerful in Vietnamese legends where children and youths were often prominent figures of wartime resistance. Huynh notes, interestingly, that the Viet Minh presented themselves as contemporary manifestations of the past heroes and martyrs who fought in the many Vietnamese wars for independence. This was combined with the totalising nature of the Vietnamese propaganda and mobilisation, thus leaving the space for new types of heroes to appear. Now, they were ordinary peasants, soldiers, women and children; as such, the 'DRV leadership thus retained the Confucian tradition of using heroic stories to guide and educate the people, but greatly expanded the pool of characters so as to facilitate mass mobilisation' (Huynh, 2015, p. 154). Many of these heroes were child soldiers themselves, and the myths about them are still alive and powerful even in modern Vietnam. As such, Huynh makes a convincing argument for engaging with cultural factors in order to gain a deeper understanding of the military conflict.

While the works I described above provide necessary and informative accounts of child soldiering in Vietnam, there is still much space for further research. For example, while Huynh's engagement with culture uncovers important factors which contributed to children's motivations and decisions, he focuses mostly on stories and legends. There are, however, many other cultural factors that worked alongside stories and are therefore also worth examining, such as family and collectivism. His analysis further explicitly did not engage with any military or socio-economic aspects of the struggle, but traced how culture and politics intertwined can provide us with an even deeper understanding of how child soldiering is enabled. Likewise, Taylor's, Guillemot's and Hynd's accounts do not go into the detailed political and social circumstances surrounding child soldiers, but they nevertheless provide useful steppingstones to investigate the experience of children.

Indeed, although the above scholars touch on the issue very briefly, there is reason to believe that Vietnamese culture and social context underwent significant changes under the communist regime. These changes were examined by Olga Dror, who focused on the militarisation of Vietnamese childhood, although her focus was children in general, rather than only child soldiers.
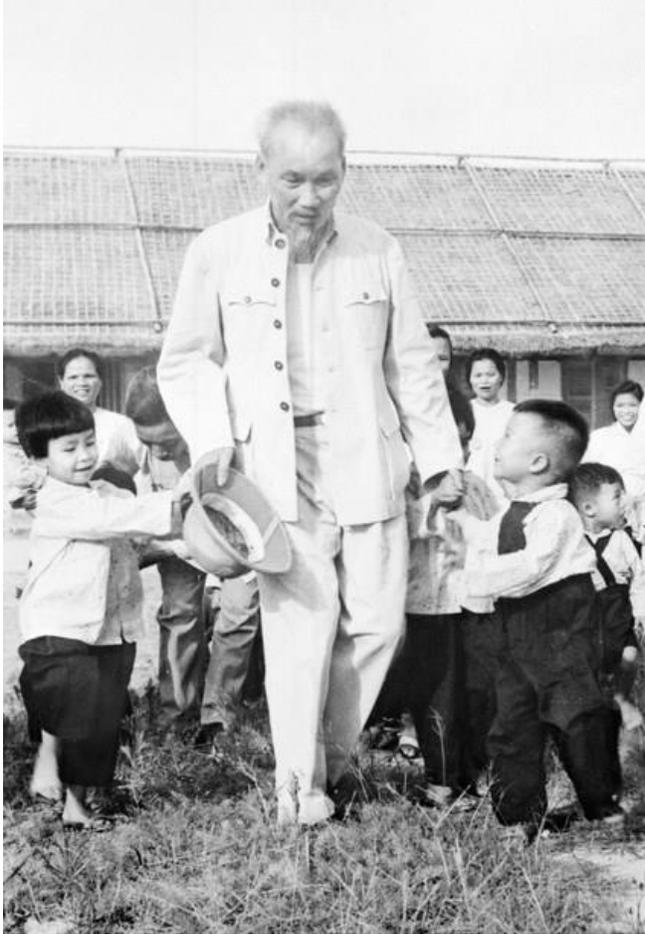
Picture 1 Kids in Vinh City Children's Camp in Nghe An province welcome President Ho Chi Minh, 1967

Yet, her insights highlight that it is also important to place cultural and social aspects of the war into the political context. For example, in investigating print materials from the Vietnam War, she concludes that many publications established a 'firm connection' between Ho Chi Minh and children (Dror, 2016, p. 428). They encouraged hatred for the 'foreign invaders', and encouraged children to understand concepts such as inequality, socialism, and injustice from a very early age. Her analysis is particularly notable with regards to how, for example, the notion of love changed under the Viet Cong social engineering. She notes that 'love was an important part of bringing to adulthood a new generation of fighters' (Dror, 2016, p. 429). Ho Chi Minh, for example, became a person whom they could love – and in loving him, they also loved more abstract notions he stood for: the goals of unifying the country and building socialism. The Ho Chi Minh-children relationship was the subject of many propaganda campaigns (Picture 1 shows one such examples), constantly shown to children and portrayed as an important part of their growing up. As such, children internalised it: 'for them, it was a genuine feeling of love maintained and transmitted from one generation to the next, and it generated a persevering loyalty to and compliance with the state and its causes' (Dror, 2016, p. 429). As a result, the notions of family also shifted: by referring to Ho Chi Minh as 'Uncle Ho', children automatically referred to him as a member of their family.

While Dror's work is very illuminating with regards to the impact of socialism on childhood, she does not apply her arguments to debates around child soldiers, although she does acknowledge that with time, these socialism-loving children will go on to become passionate fighters for the Vietnamese guerrillas. Yet, her analysis can potentially help to uncover less studied aspects of child soldiering: for example, 'love' is very rarely associated with the figure of

the child soldier, but it was clearly an important political factor in guiding the decisions of Vietnamese young combatants. Going further to investigate these issues, then, not only widens our understanding of Vietnamese military conflicts (and children's roles in them), but also helps to destabilise the stereotypical victimised and passive – or beastly and barbaric – notion of a child soldier.

It can be seen, then, that there are still gaps within the literature on Vietnamese child soldiering; there are already important findings with regards to the role of structural and social factors, but the specific impact of socio-political context is yet to be studied in-depth. The literature on the Khmer Rouge and Laotian child soldiers, however, is helpful for providing some insights into the interaction between cultural and political layers.

1.5.2 Cambodia

Child soldiering in the Khmer Rouge has been the subject of much more research than other child soldiering instances in Indochina. It is the topic of investigation both in academic studies – for example, by Klementis and Czirjak (2016) – and NGOs and media (e.g. Child Soldiers International, 2001; VOA Cambodia, 2009). This is perhaps because the regime is widely known to have recruited masses of child soldiers and child labourers – Machel (as cited in Wessells, 1997, p. 35) states that 'children who stood as tall as a rifle were often deemed eligible for military service'. Most 10–12 year olds were conscripted, and would then become 'the most brutal cadres of the regime at the ages of 12–15' (Klementis & Czirjak, 2016, p. 217).

Within the literature covering Cambodian child soldiering, there is also a diversity of assumptions with regards to the experience and motivations of children. There is, for example, a strand of literature aligning with the 'caretaker' view mentioned above. Within this viewpoint, it is suggested that Khmer Rouge recruitment was not voluntary under any circumstances, and that children had no real understanding of what they were joining. This is exemplified by the following quote, taken from a child soldier who served since he was 10: 'We believed what they told us, as we didn't have any choice […] I didn't know anything of the outside world.' (Campbell, 2013). Another case, cited by Barnitz, Path and Catalla (2001) is that of Loung Ung – a Cambodian girl who was trained as a child soldier at the age of 7, after her father has been executed and she was separated from her mother and sister. 'I was a very angry kid', she says (Cambodian Association of Illinois and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago, 2000).

Many children joined the Khmer Rouge forces in hopes of bettering their lives; others were tricked. While the Khmer Rouge leaders often promised that life in the military would be good, former child soldiers describe it as hard. In Campbell's (2013) interview, a former child soldier Aki Ra describes going through many hardships during wartime – for example, carrying 100 land mines in a sack and getting hurt by it every week. Barnitz, Path and Catalla (2001, p. 2) further cite a former Cambodian child soldier:

> We had no food supplies or clothes. I remember walking barefoot on the hot sidewalk. My feet were blistering… I kept asking my parents, "Why do we have to walk for so long without resting and with no food to eat." All of a sudden I heard gunshots. Babies cried and people screamed. I saw blood dripping from one man's head… As we walked farther I saw bodies lying on the sidewalk. One of the soldiers said, "If you want to live, do as you are told and don't stop walking." People ran for their lives. The wounded ones were killed by the Khmer Rouge soldiers or were left on the sidewalk to die.

Klementis & Czirjak (2016, p. 217) suggest that overall, 'child soldiers in Cambodia no doubt can be seen as victims of the brutal regime, who after indoctrination could be turned into perpetrators of the mass killing as well'.

The second strand of literature mirrors the 'agent-centric' view of child soldiers, thus contesting the idea that child soldiers under the Khmer Rouge were uniformly victims. This is highlighted by the fact that despite the prevalent notion of many Khmer Rouge child soldiers being forced into service, Vannak (2003) noted that many of them chose to volunteer. Reasons for doing so varied from genuinely believing that they could contribute to ending the war, to personal reasons such as revenge. Even in the case of those who did not volunteer, 'identifying these child-soldiers either as victims or perpetrators is problematic', assert Kanavou & Path (2020, p. 540). For many, they state, following orders was a survival tactic and a way to preserve their and their families' lives. Within highly constrictive circumstances, where they were exploited for labour and had to escape death on a daily basis, children 'remained obdurate in their battle for survival' (Kar, 2020, p. 5). An example Kar (2020) retells is the case of an eleven-year-old Arn, a child who noticed that the Khmer Rouge soldiers were recruiting for a music band and decided that it would give him a better chance of surviving. He then learned to play the Khim, a traditional musical instrument. Doing so provided him with 'a certain amount of power which he learns to use for his own benefits – a piece of meat, some extra rice or even just to drown the sounds of screaming prisoners and cracking skulls all around' (Kar, 2020, p. 5). Kar (2020) further reported that many

other children made their own way to Vietnam and Thailand, educated themselves, and persisted in face of death and hardship.

Other instances of people still being capable of carving out small spaces for resistance – which, for Williams (2018), is one manifestation of agency – was rescuing others, passively allowing actions (e.g. killing) *not* to occur, or not reporting what they were taught was 'anti-revolutionary behaviour'. Williams (2018, p. 53) called that 'a benevolent type of bystanding', and viewed it as a manifestation of agency because there was still an active choice to let go of an opportunity to reinforce the Khmer Rouge principles. Williams (2018, p. 57) argued that in doing so, children demonstrated 'a certain degree of tactical' agency. Williams (2018, p. 59) further notes that 'none of the interviewees used their status as children as an exculpatory strategy to reduce their agency'. This, in turn, suggests that even while the caretaker view might claim children to be more easily corrupted by the Khmer Rouge genocide, this belief was not always supported by the Cambodian children.

The third strand of literature encompasses various attempts by scholars to problematise agency or victimhood. Bernath (2016), for example, proposed using a label of 'complex political victims'. Like many scholars I have listed above, Bernath criticises the idealised image of a passive victim, arguing that it only reinforces the process of othering. By contrast, acknowledging the political nature and complexity of the Khmer Rouge child soldiers moves beyond binaries of 'good/bad' and 'us/them', acknowledging that people can experience harm while also participating in the system of oppression. This further seems in line with the sentiments in Cambodian society itself, as Bernath (2016, p. 62) states: 'Many respondents, including senior judicial officials at the ECCC, thus feel that everyone in Cambodia is a victim of DK' and that 'Ksaem Ksan, a victim association in Cambodia, explicitly adopted a broad definition of victims, accepting as a member "anyone who considers him-/herself as a victim"'.

Other conceptualisations focused on problematising agency, rather than victimhood. One such was proposed by Pina e Cunha, Clegg & Rego (2014, p. 35), who used the sociomaterial perspective that 'considers people's actions as always embedded within material as well as social processes and structures'. Within this approach, they not only investigate agency as a social phenomenon, but also aim to understand how it interacts with the material world. In doing so, they further aim to go beyond the duality of agency vs. structure; rather, they argue, agency is a process in context and time. As they point out, even considering the actions of individuals who

volunteered and diligently carried out the Khmer Rouge orders, social structures were crucial determinants in the unfolding of the genocide. This concerns not only the wider historical realities, i.e., the extremely unstable geopolitical situation and the deep collective humiliation within the group, but also conditions such as the presence of the party, the ongoing poverty, the prisons, etc. (Clegg, Pina e Cunha & Rego, 2013).

An element of their analysis which is particularly worth noting is their argument that in the case of the Khmer Rouge combatants, it is essential to take account not just of social and cultural factors, but also how children interacted with objects and artifacts. For example, some objects might symbolise bourgeois mentality, while others indicate morality. As such, they argue, 'understanding the value of objects and their meaning was therefore critical for survival' (Pina e Cunha, Clegg & Rego, 2014, p. 49). Children were influenced by and in turn reinforced the meanings accorded to cultural artifacts; this, too, shaped their experience and participation with the Khmer Rouge. As they point out: 'A poor, illiterate peasant, wearing a black uniform, holding a weapon and belonging to an army, becomes something other than an illiterate peasant, especially in a regime that glorified a "pure" class' (Pina e Cunha, Clegg & Rego, 2013, p. 233). In evaluating the actions of Comrade Duch who volunteered and became a senior figure in the Khmer Rouge, they point out that while he reproduced and reinforced the principles of the group, such reproduction was also enabled by the 'utopian frame, genocidal artefacts and an organization that legitimated the power and processes to improvise genocidal practices'. As a result, they argue, a 'hypertextual' approach is necessary to understand 'the subtleties in the process and the dynamics of agency' (Pina e Cunha, Clegg & Rego, 2013, p. 233)

Continuing the line of enquiry that understanding context and social structures is necessary to investigate the Cambodian child soldiers, Williams' (2018, p. 59) argument also needs to be considered:

> One could even go as far as to say that agency in general plays a secondary role in Cambodia, given that most social relations are embedded in strong hierarchies in which obedience is given highest precedence [...] Consequently, it could be said that culturally there is less propensity to perceive of oneself as having self-determined capacity to act, but that one is seen as the extension of the patron's will in order not to lose access to protection and resources within these patron-client networks.

This is a particularly important observation because it contextualises agency within Cambodian cultural and social frameworks; while agency did have a place among the Khmer Rouge child soldiers, it is still important to question the extent to which it even should be the main point of analysis. Beyond the strong hierarchy which stresses the importance of obedience, Kanavou and Path (2020) further note the importance of, for example, religion (Theravada Buddhism) and Cambodian culture. It is thus not surprising that a significant part of the literature on Cambodian child soldiering focuses on the structural conditions which have enabled child soldiering to take place. Several themes occur as particularly significant.

Firstly, there is an acknowledgement that the Khmer Rouge conducted large-scale social engineering, which resulted in the militarisation of children from a very early age. An essential part of this social engineering was constituted by what Kar (2020, p. 2) called 'the fiercest ever attack on the institution of the family'. Children were asked to shift their familial love and loyalty towards the Khmer Rouge and were recruited to work in labour camps in order to separate them from parents. Kiernan (1997, p. xi) further writes: 'As the Khmer Rouge redefined the family, they simply excluded children. Now children belonged not to their parents but to Angkar, the Khmer Rouge's ruling organization'. Some of the former child soldiers referred to the organisation as their 'new parent' and were sent to receive military training from the age of five (Him, 2000, p. 14).

Childhood itself became militarised. Pol Pot, the leader of the Khmer Rouge, declared: 'It is the youth of today who will take up the revolutionary tasks of tomorrow', thus considering them as the 'core force implementing the revolution' (Klementis & Czirjak, 2016, p. 216). Based on this, the Khmer Rouge reformulated the societal hierarchy – for example, children were to be 'served before adults in the communal mess halls and addressed by adults with terms of deference' (Boyden, 2003, p. 349). Children were, once again, targeted specifically because they were seen as 'free of the pollution caused by Western imperialism' (Delano & Knottnerus, 2018, p. 46). They were also considered to be good combatants because supposedly, they were ruthless – much more ruthless than adults. Boyden (2003, p.348) observes that in Cambodia commanders 'used to dread being put in the charge of younger cadre members'. Klementis & Czirjak (2016, p. 217) confirm this, stating: 'For the brutal Khmer Rouge regime the youth were the perfect soldiers as 'it is […] easy for the commanders to give orders because the children did not have a conscience and are illiterate […] they don't know what is good what is bad. So, they simply follow the orders the commanders give them.'

Perhaps because of this perception, as Boyden (2003, p.345) suggests, children were the 'prime instruments' of violence. A lot of effort went into indoctrinating children and recruiting them – which wasn't difficult, as the illiteracy in the country was high and the lessons were mostly focused on spreading propaganda. As Southerland (2006, n.p.) indicates: 'The soldiers were taught to believe that the city dwellers were "capitalists" who refused to join the revolution. They were instructed to show "class hatred" towards these "enemies."' Since the age of six, children had few writing or reading classes, but were instead 're-educated" to serve the purposes of the Khmer Rouge, which included activities ranging from spying on parents and reporting them to the authorities to learning how to use small arms and being trained to lay landmines' (Barnitz, Path & Catalla, 2001, p. 3).

The militarisation of childhood was therefore an important part of the recruitment process. Propaganda became a powerful tool through which the Khmer Rouge conducted their social engineering. Children were the primary targets of these songs, which glorified the revolution and encouraged children to join with lyrics such as:

Before the revolution, children were poor and lived lives of misery.

Living like animals, suffering as orphans…

Now the glorious revolution supports us all

Secure in health, full of strength to develop collective lives

With clothes to wear, not cold at night. (Kieran, 1997, p. xiii)

In general, then, the literature on Cambodian child soldiering echoes narratives about child soldiers in other geographical contexts: from discussing the victimhood of children, to viewing them as agents, to problematising both notions of agency and victimhood.

1.5.3 Laos

Compared to the extensive literature on child soldiering under the Khmer Rouge, research covering Laotian child soldiering is very sparse. This is at least in part due to the lack of documentation surrounding the Laotian experience in the Indochina wars – as an interviewee in Langer and Zasloff's (1969) study noted, the less papers in one's possession, the less there is to burn in the next coup d'état. The existing evidence seems to point out that, at least in the mid-20th century Laos, both sides of the Indochina conflict used child soldiers.

For McCoy (2002) Washington's interests not to let Laos fall into Communism led to CIA's 'secret war' in Laos. As part of this war, the US recruited Hmong people – an ethnicity residing primarily in the mountains in Laos – to fight on the American side. Their role was to assist American pilots, engage in espionage and ambush North Vietnamese forces. At its peak, the Hmong population accounted for 40% of active troops; its main purpose was to fight and die for the US. If a village wanted rice, it needed to provide soldiers; otherwise, it would be denounced as Pathet Lao – the Communist forces which fought in opposition. Many of the recruits were child soldiers, as one of the aid workers (Edgar Buell, as cited in Cultural Survival, 1987) admitted:

> A short time ago we rounded up 300 fresh recruits. Thirty percent were 14 years old or less, and ten of them were only ten years old. Another 30 percent were 15 and 16. The remaining 40 percent were 35 or over. Where were the ones in between? I'll tell you, they're all dead…and in a few weeks, 90 percent of [the new recruits] will be dead.

Similar observations were made by Vue (2021), who suggests that the first recruitment of boys began after 1964, when many men had already been conscripted. Age did not matter, with some as young as nine years old being conscripted. The children only needed to be taller than rifles. At 14 years old, the boys would already be considered 'men'. As such, they were frequently kidnapped, coerced into service; calling them 'men', Vue states, relieved the cadres of moral culpability.

The communist opposition, Pathet Lao, also used child soldiers, as documented in Zasloff (1973). Compared to the child soldiers who participated with the CIA, there is more literature on Pathet Lao which explicitly theorises on the notions of agency and victimhood. For example, Pholsena (2008, p. 465) asserts that the former young cadres' narratives were 'closely tied up with agency'. Unlike the Khmer Rouge, the Pathet Lao is not recorded to brutally force children to join their ranks, threatening to otherwise kill them or their family members. Therefore, the social context of the two groups of child soldiers is different to each other, which is reflected in children's motivations. The reasons why children joined the Pathet Lao vary: some reported wanting to get an education, and therefore actively sought out the Pathet Lao (knowing that they could be sent to study in Vietnam), while others wanted to get revenge on the French or American soldiers (Zasloff, 1969; Pholsena, 2008). Children exercised agency in other ways – see for example, the account recorded by Pholsena (2008) of a former Pathet Lao propaganda worker, Pa Phaivanh. She was assigned to spread propaganda and mobilise other children to join the Pathet Lao; in her words, she never stopped working, made sure everyone was satisfied with her work and was

always chosen to complete difficult tasks first. She clearly displayed a sense of pride in her achievements.

Pholsena provides perhaps one of the most theoretically nuanced explorations of the Pathet Lao child soldiering to date. Conducting life histories with children and youth who used to serve the group, she also employs a relational framework to analyse the accounts of Lao revolutionary youth. Within Pholsena's work, children also do not appear as victims or perpetrators; rather, she draws attention to the structural conditions that have enabled their actions to be carried out. She then concludes that Laotian childhood was militarised deeply, which in turn contributed to orienting children towards the revolution. Her arguments are confirmed by Huijsmans (2016), who states that the Pathet Lao became omnipresent in villagers' everyday lives. The revolutionary forces were reliant on peasants for supplying food and weapons; as such, seeing one's family become a part of revolutionary struggle soon became an ordinary occurrence. On the other hand, villagers who were targeted by the US raids often hid in the PL-controlled areas, therefore interacting closely with them. Children were already contributing to the revolution from a very young age, carrying food prepared by villagers to the North Vietnamese allies, running errands to senior fighters, or preparing bamboo stakes to use in booby traps (Pholsena, 2012; Huijsmans, 2016; Brown & Zasloff, 1986).

Like the Khmer Rouge and other Maoist-inspired groups (including the Viet Cong, as I will later describe), the Laotian group strived to conduct social engineering to create a new socialist society. Mobilisation was both a 'social process and a political practice', making local populations politically active in various ways (Pholsena, 2012, p. 178) It is important to highlight that children were not excluded from this process. From their everyday lives, to their education, everything they were exposed to was carried out specifically to shape them into good socialist subjects, whose loyalties would extend beyond their family and village, to serving the Party. While traditionally, children were valued for their contributions toward family, now they were expected to contribute to the state. As retold by Langer (1971, p. 14), a pupil:

…is constantly reminded of the fact that his responsibilities extend well beyond the narrow, traditional circle of his family and even his village. He is taught the concept of Lao nation, that he is an integral part of it, that he must love and respect members of other ethnic groups like brothers and sisters […] It is explained to him that he must love and serve his country – and that there are many ways of doing so.

Pathet Lao used persuasion and propaganda, themes of anti-imperialism and anti-colonialism, calling for expulsion of French colonialists (after 1954, this changed to the US). These appealed to nationalist and patriotic sentiments of the Lao people, promising better education and opportunities once the imperialists were expelled. An interviewee in Zasloff's study recounts how a general suggested he come with him to further their education after a failed exam. He also recounts that the Viet Minh also came to Laos to give speeches and ask their parents to send their children to Vietnam for education. Another example of such appeal (Zasloff, 1973):

> To recruit men for the army, they tell the people that Laos is a country rich in natural resources. It is a beautiful country, abundant in rivers and streams and great wealth. But the Lao people are still poor because of capitalism and US imperialism. The young people – male and female – owners of Laos, regardless of race or tribe, must stand up, hand in hand in the struggle against US imperialism. Many people believe what they say. But some refuse to serve the Pathet Lao. The Pathet Lao say to them, "Why do you refuse when others volunteer?" You should be patriotic. You should follow the majority.

Mass organisations were further established, which generally brought 'every able-bodied individual' into at least one (Zasloff, 1973). Participants in women's organisations, for example, would prepare gifts and food for soldiers in order to lift morale. Within each organisation, propaganda meetings and self-criticism sessions were a frequent occurrence. From the interviews, we learn that many Lao youths responded to the revolutionary spirit, and many people were enthusiastic about independence.

Pholsena (2017) further highlights that children in Laos, like in many other agrarian societies, did not expect their childhood to be associated with solely play and innocence. In her account:

> …children were expected to take care of themselves. They were divided into small groups, and supervised by older adolescents. Each group took turns to prepare meals during the day and evenings. Only rice was provided, so the children had to search for the rest (vegetables and other foodstuffs) themselves. (Pholsena, 2017, p. 120).

This happened under the guidance of the revolutionary cadres, and again highlights that local notions of childhood need to be taken into account when investigating the phenomenon of child soldiering.

Both Pholsena and Huijsmans have made two important insights with regards to Laotian youth. For example, as Pholsena points out, while it is undeniable that children were strongly

influenced by their social context, their subjective understandings – of new information, of their political life – is actively generated by themselves. Even if they were significantly shaped by the ongoing war, and the militarisation of childhood and education, they were agents in a sense that they actively assigned meanings to these processes and responded in different ways to the ongoing processes, even amidst the government efforts to 'control and homogenise them as living subjects and as a category' (Pholsena, 2017, p. 111).

Huijsmans (2016) further does not consider children as passive victims, but approaches the issue from a different perspective. Rather, he points to their agentic role in building the future Laotian state. In his words:

> Situating this activity in the Lao revolutionary struggle and the wider Indochina War makes it more than a mere expression of being a child. It also becomes geopolitically charged, both in relation to the social transformation to which it contributed and for the sort of political subjectivity it triggered. (Huijsmans, 2016, p. 148)

In other words, the experiences of militarised childhood, the communist political education, frequent interactions with Laotian and North Vietnamese militants shaped a certain political orientation for these children. They, in turn, have played an important role in legitimising the emerging Lao state.

The second observation, which Huijsmans notes, is that the former child revolutionaries are now considered heroes of the revolutions, with many holding positions of power in the post-war Laotian state. They tend to view their experience as positive, despite the hardships they had to face; these experiences, however, tend to be ignored in the wider conversations surrounding child soldier victimhood and agency. Pholsena (2017, p. 109) further echoes these sentiments, stating that many children who participated in the revolutionary efforts (many of whom only returned home in their mid-twenties) have done 'extremely well' – it is therefore necessary to take into account the diversity of these individuals.

1.6. Conclusion

Overall, the literature on children – and more specifically, child soldiers – has taken several approaches. Firstly, the dominant approach, which is particularly prominent in NGOs and humanitarian appeals, is that of child as a victim. From this perspective, children who participate in wars are conceptualised as suffering, innocent, and vulnerable. These approaches amplify the fault of adults while simultaneously minimising the role of children in making their decisions. This approach, however, has been contested by much of the academic literature. The alternative 'agency' narrative emerged as a response to the dominant conceptions of children as a priori victims. It allowed for conceptualising children's intelligence, ability to plan and be proactive in even the most difficult circumstances. However, this approach, too, has been criticised – most notably because of its associations with independence and free will, which are not always applicable to actors in subordinate positions such as children. In addition, as Thomas (2016) argues, agency presents a good starting point, rather than an end argument in itself.

This thesis positions itself with the literature which assumes children's intelligence and capabilities as a starting point, and starts its analysis from this premise. This strand of literature is particularly useful to my case, as it helps to approach agency as contextual and relational: in the case of a Southeast Asian country, it is necessary to reflect on issues of communist social engineering, the changing category of childhood and family, and the tight social hierarchies that govern everyday relations. In turn, these are important aspects to consider when analysing how these interact with individual children's decisions, motivations, and courses of action.

The majority of current literature on child soldiers in Vietnam, particularly its theoretical insights, does aim to conceptualise child soldiers as more than victims; however, there is still much space for further research. While some literature aims to engage with cultural practices continuous with child soldiering, there is not yet a concrete conceptualisation of how these intertwine with politics and militarisation. The literature on the Pathet Lao and the Khmer Rouge, does, however, highlight that the presence of communist groups and their subsequent social engineering were significant factors which shaped child soldiering. Similar in-depth analysis can also be made in the context of the Vietnamese military conflicts.

This thesis, then, aims to analyse the previously overlooked lived experiences of child soldiers in wartime Vietnam. It will do so in a way which does not conceptualise children as either victims or perpetrators – but rather as social actors with their own personal histories, specific

social contexts, and rich internal lives. Such an approach necessitates a particular theoretical framework, which I will address in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Conceptual framework

2.1. Introduction

This section outlines the conceptual framework that this thesis will take. Based on the gaps I have identified in the literature review, I will approach children as social actors who affect and are affected by their communities, history, and realities of their own environments. I describe how a framework to reconcile both structure and agency in violent conflict can be drawn from a relational approach. Specifically, I demonstrate that Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field can be particularly useful to help me achieve the aim of positioning children as deeply social and political actors.

The Bourdieusian framework is still not common in the research on child soldiering; however, it is much more common in the field of conflict studies (particularly in research on participation in insurgencies and civil wars) and childhood studies. I show how various insights already gained in these two fields can be applied to study child soldiers. More specifically, a relational approach has shown that participation in insurgencies and civil wars is a consequence of individual personal history and previous exposure to militarisation. Similarly, Bourdieusian theorists have encouraged approaching ideology and wider political context as social practice which is often subconsciously taken for granted as unquestionably true by individuals. It is this militarisation and exposure to ideology which predisposes individuals to take up arms – even if this action does not make sense outside of their specific context.

However, to understand child soldiering, we also need to understand not just everyday militarisation, but also expectations and social practices unique to childhood. I therefore pay close attention to how family, child labour, and alternative models of child soldiering can also help me to conceptualise children as social and political actors. Using these theoretical assumptions and concepts leads me to conceptualise the habitus of children in wars and use this analytical tool throughout my research to understand the experience of Vietnamese child soldiers.

2.2. Relational approach

Current approaches regarding child soldiers, as we have seen, either focus on the structure – thereby presenting children as victims; or on agency. Both have faced various criticisms.

Structure-based approaches, particularly prominent in the humanitarian discourses, often focus on economic collapse, abuse, and violence that drive children to join the armed groups; or question children's ability to exercise free will and independent thinking. These approaches have been criticised for reducing children to helpless victims unable to make their own decisions, as objects rather than subjects (Shepler, 2004). In doing so, any possibilities of voluntary recruitment, meaningful engagement with child soldiers, and the complexity of children's lives and thoughts is reduced to reflect their supposed irrationality (Hart, 2006). Agency-based approaches have similarly been criticised – most prominently this has been voiced in Shaw's work, who described notions of agency as 'disturbingly resonant of a dominant North Atlantic discourse of unfettered individualism and freedom of choice' (Shaw, 2002, p. 19). Thomas (2016) similarly pointed out that the agency approach assumes a liberal subject with rationality, independence, and choice but ignores broader history and social forces. In sum, then, reinforcing the idea that people – especially those that have been marginalised – are agents of their own lives, risks essentialising their actions and de-historicising them. It is acknowledged that researchers writing about experiences of marginalised actors employ the agency approach to argue against stereotypes of passivity and victimhood, and the importance of this narrative is not belittled. However, its usefulness in presenting actors' experience is often questioned and carries assumptions that 'simply becoming more conscious is a tremendous achievement' (Bordo, 1993, p. 30).

Both of the approaches above fit what Emirbayer (1997) defined as a 'substantive' approach – an approach which assumes that actors and their interests are fixed, located in the substance of actors and social structures. The relationships between them are epiphenomenal. In presenting an alternative to this approach, Emirbayer, however, highlights: 'Structures are empty abstractions apart from the several elements of which they are composed; societies themselves are nothing but pluralities of associated individuals' (1997, p. 288). Individual people cannot be separated from the contexts in which they operate. Through this ontology, agency is seen as more than a property that 'breathes life' into passive objects, as often is the case with children (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 294). Rather, Emirbayer sees it as inseparable from concrete situations – agency is conceptualised as an engagement *towards* something – events, places, or people. Similarly, this ontic perspective helps to frame actions not as 'good' or 'bad', because they are not presumed or given; rather, they are evaluated as consequences of actors' engagement with one another, often in uncertain and difficult circumstances (Emirbayer, 1997, p. 309).

A relational approach has been used in both child soldier studies as well as wider conflict studies. Shepler (2014) similarly criticised the agency/structure duality as dead-end and limited in

its use, observing the problematic implications of framing child soldiering in terms of self-interest and agency only. By approaching structure and agency as intertwining, Shepler conceptualised 'social life as the sum of practices' and approached war itself as a social phenomenon, and located the actions of the children in that space, rather than approaching these actions on their own (Shepler, 2014, p. xii). From a relational perspective, decisions to participate in violence are theorised as a product of history and the societal context within which violence takes place. Bakonyi and De Guevara (2012, p. 4), for example, drew on Tilly's 'repertoires of contention' to demonstrate how these repertoires were affected by historical structures and grievances. As they explain, there are various modes of actions to take in response to grievance: ignore, publicly protest, participate in strikes. The mode employed depends on the historical experiences: for example, if expressing grievances violently was the most common way, this method is more likely to be employed. As such, it is the social context – previous exposure to violence, family history, war experience – that shapes the actors' reasoning and actions. The authors further point out that violence tends to persist due to active maintenance of relationships between armed groups and non-armed population. Similar sentiments are pointed out by Bultmann (2015) who suggested that in many cases, war eventually penetrates and is normalised in the everyday life to the extent that the question is not why people participate, but why *wouldn't* someone participate. Both of these analyses suggest that those joining the struggle are not free agents, but rather a product of social forces.

Social communities are also significant factors in deciding whether an individual joins the struggle – Schlichte (2014, p. 368), for example, showed how motivations for military veterans were always connected to a collective – an imagined community, family traditions, or friends and colleagues. In this sense, 'all individuals are integrated within social settings', and decisions about war participation are significantly driven by the social environment surrounding agents, while economic need played only a minor role (Schlichte, 2014, p. 377). Social ties further continue to be important as actors find themselves in the battlefields – at times, they were more effective in sustaining the military efforts than political propaganda (Shils and Janowitz, 1948). Family history further affects how individuals behave during their time in the armed organisations, as it was shown that the decisions military leaders take are often guided not by rational calculations but by the beliefs which they adopted throughout their life (Bultmann, 2015). As such, rather than evaluating actors' actions as rational or irrational, it is useful to view them as making sense within the framework in which the actors are operating. Similarly, rebellion itself, as demonstrated by Parkinson (2013), is sustained and determined by informal social networks – kinship, friendship,

and the community, as they become a central source of information, finance and supply for Palestinian militant organisations.

Overall, research conducted with a relational perspective suggests that children and adults join armed movements not so much because of individual decisions or structural forces only, but because of the ways in which they are positioned in wider social contexts. These previous social contexts, and consequently incorporated beliefs, continue to affect individuals' decisions and attitudes after they join the movements. Thus, analysing the social contexts and histories is essential if we are to understand their involvement in violence.

2.3. Bourdieu's concepts

The need to employ a relational approach to reconcile agency and structure led scholars such as Shepler (2014), Bultmann (2015) or Rosenoff (2010) to apply a Bourdieu-inspired approach, whose concepts have been widely applied in the fields of sociology and education. In this section, I will elaborate more on Bourdieu's framework and specifically three of his key concepts: habitus, field, and capital. I will later explain how these have been particularly useful to studying civil wars and the impact of ideology.

Bourdieu's concepts are particularly useful for engaging with the logic of everyday life and power relations embedded within it. This is because, as Power (1999, p. 48) observed, Bourdieu's approach, in general, is one that defies binaries such as 'micro/macro, subjective/objective, material/symbolic, structure/agency, empirical/theoretical, public/private, and freedom/necessity'. Like Emirbayer, Bourdieu criticised substantialism: he thought that it 'recognizes no other reality than that which is directly given to the intuition of ordinary experience' (Bourdieu, 1987, p.3). He expressed dissatisfaction with rational models and rejects the idea of social actors as conscious and calculative beings (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In his work, Bourdieu shows how the different objective conditions – social class or cultural trajectory – shape individuals' tastes, preferences, or courses of action, e.g., going to university (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu, 1977). His work has been applied to other fields – for example, the ways in which gender, ethnicity, environment can similarly predispose people's choices (Power, 1999). The actors, in turn, reproduce social practices they had previously internalised. A Bourdieusian approach, then, requires the researcher to identify the systems surrounding the objects of study: everyday practices, interactions, systems of dominations, among others (Swartz, 2012). He believed that

identifying these systems solely from the accounts of the actors can sometimes miss the fact that they are often positioned in their everyday consciousness, taken for granted, and therefore not necessarily articulated explicitly.

His approach has been criticised as retreating into objectivism (King, 2000). As King points out, Bourdieu views habitus as shaped unconsciously by social structures, thus leaving little space for agency. However, Bourdieu himself opposed the idea that actors are simple 'epiphenomena of structure' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. viii). His thinking, as he states, started from attempts to understand 'how can behaviour be regulated without being the product of obedience to rules?' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 65), implying that he acknowledges that people do not blindly obey norms. He also argued that the role of actors who take part in reproducing those structures cannot be ignored. He points out that structures themselves are reproduced by actors – the decisions they make and courses of action they take. Other authors argue that Bourdieu's approach is 'relatively open to individual agency' and allows for acknowledgement of unpredictable creative actions (Fleetwood, 2016). In short, Bourdieu's approach is one which acknowledges the *dialectic* nature between the external and the internal, rather than emphasising one or the other.

Bourdieu, then, provided an alternative 'third way' to reconcile both structure and agency. He comes to the conclusion that it is important to understand the overarching society and how it produces rules which regulate actors' behaviour (Bourdieu, 1977). In the end, it is the interaction between actors and structures, that produce and regulate actions and attitudes: 'The real is relational' (Bourdieu, as cited in Schinkel, 2007, p. 712). Bourdieu (2000) compares this process with that of a composer who is constrained by the keys available on the keyboard yet does not question the creativity and the autonomy of the composer. Further, in his own writing, Bourdieu does acknowledge that in some circumstances, rational calculations of costs and benefits take place under some circumstances: for example, in times of crisis, 'when the adjustment of subjective and objective structures is brutally disrupted' (1992, p. 131).

Bourdieu's approach is further one which gives space to account for factors which go beyond rational calculations: desires (sometimes subconscious), collective sense of what is simply 'done' yet hardly articulated. It is also significant to note that for Bourdieu, people may not always be rational, but they are *reasonable.* Their reason, as he argues, is possible *precisely because* they have internalised objective conditions and learned to navigate them subconsciously, i.e., from actors' interactions with their structures. In Bourdieu's own words:

They know how to "read" the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made (by opposition to everything that the expression "this is not for the likes of us" designates), through practical anticipations that grasp, at the very surface of the present, what unquestionably imposes itself as that which "has" to be done or said (and which will retrospectively appear as the "only" thing to do or say).' (1992, p. 130).

Bourdieu, then, was concerned with how behaviour of individuals was regulated and determined, but at the same time recognised that agency exists and was careful not to reduce actors to thoughtless products of structures. He developed a conceptual toolbox to understand the ways in which actors interact with their environments, how their attitudes and views are shaped, as well as how they participate in reproducing social orders. Of particular relevance to this thesis are his concepts of habitus, field, and capital, which the next sections will describe.

2.3.1 Habitus

Bourdieu (1990, p. 13) defines habitus as 'a system of acquired dispositions' – thoughts, beliefs, values – which organise and predispose individuals to action. It inclines individuals' specific ways to act and think, and thus acts as a generator for individual practice (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 55). Baird (2011, p. 52) also notes that these dispositions are not fixed but durable; as such, individuals are 'disposed', but not rigidly so, to reproduce cultures and practices of the spaces and environments around them. The formation of habitus is a lifelong process, and Bourdieu (1990, p. 86) specifically highlighted its link to individual history. While habitus is a product of childhood experience and socialisation, it is constantly modified through the individual's encounters in their social world, and the transformations therein. For example, Bourdieu himself explored how the economic habitus of Algerian workers previously operating in a precapitalist economy changed due to colonisation. He criticised previous rational action theories for ignoring how economic behaviour such as working for a wage and saving, had to be 'acquired' and thus reflects 'quite particular historical conditions' (Bourdieu, 2000, p. 18). Behavioural change was not a consequence of rational calculations, he argues, but historically constituted. The present, then, is both acted upon and also internalised to 'add another layer' to earlier socialisations, which is why habitus can also be described as 'a complex interplay between past and present' (Reay, 2004, p. 434). Because habitus is, as Nash (1990, p. 434) calls it, 'internalised structure' or the objective made subjective, it acts as bridge between structure and agency, bringing both together to understand social and subjective experiences.

Habitus is therefore strongly associated with social practice, with scholars such as Leaney (2018, p. 208) calling it 'embodied practice'. For Bourdieu, practice is the result of the relationship between one's disposition, the resources they possess, and their position in the social arena (Bourdieu, 1986). A particularly illustrative example of how habitus becomes embodied practice is explained in McDonough (2006). As she explains, initial socialisation and education shape individuals' habitus and, with time, result in 'prereflective, embodied and immediate' character to practice (McDonough, 2006, p. 629). In other words, actors internalise ways of understanding the world, patterns, and principles of social contexts which surround them to the point where they intuitively understand the constraints (or opportunities to adapt) to the social, cultural, and material conditions. It is this 'intentionality without intention, the knowledge without cognitive intent, the prereflective, infraconscious mastery that agents acquire of their social world by way of durable immersion within it' which, to Bourdieu, shapes social practice (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 19).

In turn, it is through these unquestioned attitudes and taken-for-granted daily actions, that social practice is reproduced (McDonough, 2006). Through habitus, past experiences constantly affect present practices, regulating them into constancy stronger than explicit rules and norms (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 54). Social practice, then, shapes and is shaped by habitus. The conceptualisation of this process will be particularly important later, when I explain how individuals (and specifically children) are constrained, while at the same time reproduce, social practices which are impacted by the dominant ideology and ongoing militarisation of their everyday life.

2.3.2 Field and capital

Habitus is durable but always changing – and it changes through its continuous dialogue with the field where, according to Bourdieu, actors are positioned. The field, or a sphere where the actors and their relations are positioned, influences and restrains people's choices and actions (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 97). Notably, the field's rules are often followed by individuals unconsciously, as described in Bourdieu's football field analogy to describe the actors' 'feel for the game' – players understand the rules very well and can, without being aware of it, predict possible outcomes, or consequences of their actions – for example, the direction of a ball which is being thrown by another player. Within these rules, they are also able to negotiate and navigate the field, i.e., to improvise given the game's rules and resources, and each of their actions, in turn, similarly affects the field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). An example of this was particularly strongly demonstrated in Baird's (2011, p. 254) study of youth entering gangs, summed up in a

quote: 'You don't dream of packing biscuits in a factory' – reflecting the constraints of fields they grew up in. Individuals in a given field do not consciously think about their actions, but act according to what is considered appropriate in the group (Bourdieu, 1990). Given the field's influence on actions, understanding the field – for example, the field of war – is vital to understanding the courses of action that people take.

Within the field, according to Bourdieu, actors are struggling for capital. Bourdieu (1986) differentiates between economic (material assets), symbolic (honour and prestige), and social capital (affiliations and networks; family, religious and cultural heritage). Agents with differing amounts of capital occupy different positions in the field and therefore have different possibilities and strengths (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 102). At the same time, actors with more capital can afford to negotiate the field – as Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992, p. 99) put it, 'to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game'. For example, they can discredit certain forms of capital, or make other forms more valuable. In this sense, capital can be used 'both as a weapon and as a stake of struggle' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 98).

Bourdieu's investigations of different fields help to illustrate the notions of field and capital. For example, in his work on linguistic field, he described how language competence can be considered a form of capital – in certain contexts, knowledge of French is devalued in relation to English. He also demonstrates how within this field, valuation of language competencies depend on who is using the language – the dominant or the dominated: 'at the level of interactions between individuals, speech always owes a major part of its value to the value of the person who utters it' (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 652). The changing nature of fields was also observed by Bourdieu (1969) in his descriptions of the creative field – since it is dependent on the aristocratic field, the canons of taste shift in response to changes in cultural ideals. In another example, Hilgers and Mangez (2014, p. 5) demonstrate how players in the political field need to ensure representation to derive legitimacy and thus, power. Youth in the Baird's study (2012), being restricted by the field they are in, struggled for capital – defined in this study as assets or signifiers of male identity – through gaining money, respect and eventually joining a gang. Gang activities were seen as guarantors of respect and dignity, the 'masculine capital of power'. It was also noted that changing their field also changed what the youth perceived was 'capital', i.e., when the boys were educated in a community programme, their understanding of masculinity and how to acquire it changed.

Overall, then, Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus allows for assuming flexibility and change in humans' actions while still acknowledging that actors' predispositions are durable. Further, they facilitate a deeper understanding of actors' positions and connections to their own social contexts,

and how these are shaped by actors' personal histories. For a phenomenon such as participating in war as a child, these concepts will be particularly useful in helping to determine how agency and structure intertwine.

2.4. Bourdieu's concepts applied

In this section, I will describe how the issues of civil wars and ideology have been studied from a Bourdieusian perspective. Insights from this research will further help me in conceptualising the ongoing militarisation and the dominance of ideology in children's social contexts. Based on this research, I will conceptualise ideology not only as a set of abstract ideas and attitudes, but also as a powerful force which becomes social practice. Similarly, war will be approached as a social process in itself. Both phenomena will be taken as constantly changing, interacting with agents, *structured* and *structuring* individuals' habitus.

2.4.1 Civil wars

As Husu (2012) states, the relationship between structure, position occupied by agents, and their habitus, explain emergence and characteristics for political change. Civil wars have their own rules and create new fields; for example, the presence of rebels in the area, through their relationships with civilians, can cause deep societal changes on the local level and cause political mobilisation and change in one's own identity (Arjona, Kasfir & Mampilly, 2015). However, so far, as Wood (2008, p. 539) observes, little 'attention has been paid to the social processes of civil war' – that is, the practices, and transformation of social actors that it brings. And yet, specific social processes take place that inevitably will have an effect on people positioned in the civil wars and their actions – adults, youth, and children alike. For example, Korf and Fünfgeld (2004, p. 5) conceptualise war as a social field and point out how it contributes to strategies of survival becoming essential to the everyday life: if people cannot escape the conflict, they have to follow certain rules, or they risk being excluded from the field – being abducted, imprisoned, or killed. Bultmann (2015) further looks closer at insurgency as a social field, with its own rules and resources that would not be equally valued outside of it. Eventually, these are internalised, and actors in the field start to negotiate and navigate it in their own ways. This is particularly true for children born into war, as will be shown later by Rosenoff (2010). War, then, is a field to be

navigated, with its own new rules and disruptions of old practices (Bultmann, 2015), and will also affect children's actions.

Research has also shown how different insurgency groups accumulate and struggle for various kinds of capital. Metelits (2018, p. 689), for example, described how a rebel group, Polisario Front, in Morocco, has displayed resilience despite 'a large portion of its people living in refugee camps and with limited financial resources'. However, due to accumulation of social capital – favourable reporting, raising awareness – and symbolic capital (honour), the group survived. Within the insurgent groups themselves, there is a struggle for capital between actors in different positions. Certain forms of capital are especially important in insurgency groups such as military socialisations, honour, number of battles fought. The importance of accumulating these is shown in Bultmann (2014), who showed how some guerrilla strongmen, despite not having initial economic or educational resources, could rise to high ranks in their groups by displaying bravery and winning many battles. Others – the intellectuals – occupied high ranks due to high volumes of cultural and social resources, such as possessing good education or being well-connected. These types of symbolic and social capital are observed to be 'almost exclusively in the field of insurgency' (Bultmann, 2015, p. 459).

Individual habitus of people who participated in insurgencies has also been shown to be shaped by their ongoing realities. For example, Brenner (2019) has argued that in the case of Myanmar conflict, grassroots insurgents are unlikely to consciously deliberate their choice to support an armed group – rather, it is seen as natural and expected. Brenner further cites the cases of IRA supporters, for whom the decision was 'so obvious it was inexplicable' (Toolis as cited in Brenner, 2019, p. 21). In these cases, supporting insurgency was a result of personal history, everyday actions, as well as the social context – all internalised in the habitus and people and communities. The effect of prolonged presence of armed groups on communities is similarly noted by Bultmann, who observes that 'a society at war does not turn social relations and structure completely upside down, but perpetuates them, while also transforming them in many respects' (2018, p. 615). Within military life, the habitus continues to be shaped further. The norms of insurgency life are internalised, making the actors' military experience, values and skills continue to 'structure their subjectivity in the social world' even in post-war life and in civilian settings (Maringira & Carrasco, 2015, p. 329). Maringira, Gibson and Richters (2014) observed that war experience shaped the participants' problem-solving strategies, language, capacity to enact violence and how they thought about their own social and political world. In other words, military

veterans continued 'maintaining their past in their present lives' (Maringira, Gibson & Richters, 2014, p. 32).

What both of Bourdieu's concepts help demonstrate, is that actions, including participation in violent conflict, while partially shaped by rationality and autonomous choice, are also constructed by both practices and historical dispositions (Csernatoni, 2014, p. 212). As such, explanations of attitude and behaviour will be most effective by drawing on analyses of social space where the actors are located (within the field) and how the agent arrived at their habitus (Benson & Neveu, 2005, p. 3). Therefore, this approach will be effective in describing the child soldier experience – how the children's thoughts and actions are, in some ways, pre-determined, but not completely passive.

2.4.2 Ideology

One of the arguments of this thesis is that ideology provides significant impact on social and cultural expectations of childhood and, as a result, whether children choose to participate in the struggle. Many definitions of ideology revolve around it as a system of predominant ideas, a system of opinions or different modes of interpretations. See, for example, Althusser (1966, p. xxii) who defines ideology as 'a system (with its own logic and rigor) of representations (images, myths, ideas or concepts)'. Adorno et. al (2019, p. 2), similarly, defines it as 'An organization of opinions, attitudes, and values – a way of thinking about man and society', while Campbell et. al (1980, p. 192) further clarify that it is 'a particularly elaborate, close-woven, and far-ranging structure of attitudes. By origin and usage its connotations are primarily political…' The above definitions stress the importance of ideas, attitudes, and representations. However, Bourdieusian approaches to ideology conceptualise it as a *social practice*. In other words, ideology does not only embrace ideas, theories, and symbols, but also activity: behaviour patterns, gestures, and actions (Franco and Chand, 1989). These do not negate the importance of symbolic images and attitudes; indeed, one cannot exist without the other. Franco and Chand (1989, p. 2601) further observe that the 'symbolic' or 'ideational' aspects of ideologies *need* 'a material base for expression and the material base influences the formation of the symbolic'. Both of these definitions will provide useful insights to analyse child soldiering in Vietnam, given how prominent the influence of communism was there during the period studied in this research.

Susen (2015, p. 202) further describes ideology as a 'structuring and a structured structure', shaped by social interactions and attributed meanings. It is in line with a relational approach and

the concepts of habitus and field outlined above. While agents are complex social actors who do affect structure in a variety of ways, they are still constrained by historical, social, and political conditions. Ideology provides one source of these constraints; indeed, one of its very functions is to direct and orient actions (Bourdieu and Boltanski, as cited in Susen, 2014). By definition, every ideology is normative. As a result, as Susen (2014, p. 91) further argues: 'it succeeds in converting itself into a material force capable of structuring embodied actions and interactions'. Franco and Chand (1989) provide a helpful explanation of how this happens: ideologies, they argue, 'tell individuals what is good, beautiful, desirable, and what is not'; on the other hand, they 'define what is possible and what is not' (Franco & Chand, 1989, p. 2608). This insight will be applied to our conceptualisations of child soldiering which can only be enabled in a social context where it is internalised as possible and even desirable. If we take Franco and Chand's explanation further, ideology can even shape children's existential understanding of who they are, which in turn also shapes their desire to take up arms.

Habitus itself, then, becomes 'embodied ideology' (Scollon, 2003, p. 178). Ideological principles and convictions assume an unquestioned, taken for granted status because ideology enables the habitulisation of various conventions, which are gradually socialised as natural. If necessary, the 'rhetoric of 'scientific evidence' can be employed to bestow a dominant discourse with legitimacy' (Susen 2014, p. 97). In turn, dominant ideologies are consistently reproduced as actors continue to internalise the normative schemes of thought (Susen, 2014). As a result, even simple actions carry in them 'a whole history of hidden dialogicality, *partly conscious, partly unconscious'* (Scollon, 2003, p. 177; emphasis added). This internalisation of normative ideas and hidden meanings behind social practices is an essential component of the life of social actors, as it equips them with the necessary skills, 'feel for the game' that will enable children to understand and navigate their social world.

One illustrative case study demonstrating how ideology becomes a part of the habitus is Scollon's (2003) account of social differences in 1990s China with its socialist ideology where social practices were focused on egalitarianism, while the social relations in Hong Kong, were governed by hierarchical and gender-based naming practices. These practices were already part of the individuals' habitus; while not particularly noticeable at first, the discrepancy between two different groups became much more pronounced during times of political tension. In turn, the ways of addressing one's friends and neighbours became more noticeable and laden with signals about one's political alliances. Scollon (2003, p. 193) concludes:

…each particular social practice has its phylogenesis within the nexus of practice of a community that shares an ideology. That is, political alignment is deeply rooted in habitus which in turn has roots intertwined with embodied ideologies. An individual who grows up in a community internalizes complexes of linked social practices as habitus tied to common ideologies.

Again, it must be underlined that individuals, in carrying out these actions – for example, addressing their seniors in an egalitarian manner – often do not consciously think of their choice of pronouns as explicitly political (in this case, for example, socialist). Internalised schemas in habitus are subconscious. As Scollon emphasises they can become particularly salient sometimes, e.g., during particular political or military conflict.

This does not necessarily imply that structures determine all aspects of individuals subjectivity. Ideology does not simply provide norms and ideas which all subjects passively follow. Franco and Chand (1989) note that there are often desires or aligned values with predominant ideology; quite often, individuals can be observed to be rationalising and explaining their desires as aligned with the governing ideology. Ideology also equips people with knowledge on how to perform 'innumerable daily actions and with the appropriate reasons for that behaviour' (Franco & Chand, 1989, p. 2608). Doing so, in turn, reproduces new hierarchies, new values, and codes of conduct.

Overall, then, a Bourdieusian framework conceives ideology not only as a set of ideas and political beliefs, but also as a social practice which significantly impacts one's habitus. With its strong normative character, ideology can be a powerful force which directs individuals towards specific attitudes: what is right, desirable, and what constitutes their subjectivity. Understanding ideology as a social practice is particularly helpful as I will later analyse the role of communism in shaping and guiding child soldiers' decisions.

2.5. Relational approaches in childhood studies

The Bourdieusian approach to the study of war and politics has proven fruitful in a variety of studies. However, child soldiering is affected not only by the context of war, but also by the everyday childhood-specific issues, as shown by Shepler (2014). Thus, both existing literature on war habitus and the literature on childhood studies more broadly can contribute to fleshing out the habitus and field of child soldiers.

While Bourdieusian approaches are not yet common in the study of children in war, the idea of children as social actors, and the importance of accounting for their everyday life, is more firmly established in the broader childhood studies. For example, similar to Bourdieu, Henriques et. al (1984) voiced a criticism of the individual-society dualism, highlighting the importance of not separating children from their social settings since children are actors who are co-constituting with structure. These claims are echoed by Mannion (2007, p. 406), who suggests that focusing on children's individual voices, and also their relations with adults and peers, 'is not only a better reflection of the lived experience of children and adults, but it opens up new important and fertile territory for this expanding field'. Children's agency in these approaches is conceptualised as relational – how children negotiate and interact with their environments (Brady, Lowe & Lauritzen, 2015).

Tracing the application of Bourdieu and other relational approaches in the childhood literature is helpful in guiding my thinking about the particular habitus of child soldiers in the context of the Vietnam War. To do so, I will focus on the literature that establishes family and schools as political spaces which contribute to the children's habitus. I will then analyse how the literature on child labour has demonstrated the influence of both family and cultural norms on the children's decision to work. Lastly, I will explain how children already participate in politics and thus can be seen as political subjects, rather than objects. The various factors I explore here will be those from which a child soldier habitus comes into being.

2.5.1 The role of family

Given the findings of relational studies on violent conflict, it is logical to assume that child soldiers are often at least partially affected by their family and communities around them. As such, understanding the phenomenon of child soldiering can be deepened by examining the role of family in socialising children into dispositions where political participation and labour are the norm. It is important to note, however, that many definitions of family go beyond immediate family but also include relationships with relatives, godparents, and people who are 'like family' (Mason & Tipper, 2008).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, children are firstly embedded in families – this is where their primary habitus develops, which in turn is 'born out of formative experiences of earliest infancy, of the whole collective history of family and class' (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 91). Similarly, Gabriel (2017, p. 211) describes family as *the* primary habitus, the 'main institution where young children initially

internalize ways of thinking'. Directly or indirectly, adults in the family transmit to their children basic principles and values toward life, their routines and social networks. Children, especially in the early developing years, often internalise the world of their family not as one of many possible worlds, but as the only possible one (Tomanovic, 2004). As such, we cannot consider children's actions and agency without further evaluating their position in families.

Family's political influence takes place in early adolescence (Tedin, 1974) in various ways: by teaching children about the family's values and predisposing them towards a certain political attitude; by fostering an atmosphere where politics can be openly discussed, thus making the topic of politics itself a familiar one for them; or by family members participating in politics, thus putting in motion the mechanism of imitation (Torney-Purta, 2017). In many studies, it was observed that there was no need for direct transmission. In the words of Beck and Jennings, being born into a certain family by itself 'provides the child with a social identity and a location within the social structure, which in turn affects political orientations' (1991, p. 744). This is particularly true for places with homogenous environment where neighbours and peers share the same political values; thus, these were transmitted not only by family, but also other communities around children (Minns & Williams, 1989). Bultmann's work (2015) is especially useful in demonstrating how family and previous personal experience affect ways of dealing with problems that arise later, or leadership styles implemented in insurgency groups. Observing the case of insurgents in Cambodia, he argued that the decisions which agents made in war were guided not only by rational calculations, but also by their personal experience: for example, to understand power techniques in insurgent groups 'means to examine […] their inherited social background into account as well as the resources they acquired during the life course and during the participation in different fields' (Bultmann, 2015, p. 177).

Family, then, is the 'repository' from which values and loyalties are initially drawn – including political ones (Jennings & Niemi, 1968, p. 177). Family socialises children and transmits its social values, and it is thus not surprising that often, the political attitudes of children echo those of families on issues such as foreign affairs, civil rights, and party politics (Liebes & Ribak, 1992); famous political leaders and student radicals often followed their parents' footsteps (Beck and Jennings, 1982, p. 98). This is because within the family, social orders are reproduced through traditions. Reay and Vincent (2014), applying the Bourdieusian approach, argue that these traditions are perpetuated through generations, celebrated, narrated into family-specific traditions, or a sense of what is 'done' in this family – also called family spirit – making children a part of a cohesive unit. Some examples of these are attendance at specific universities, getting specific

jobs, but is also echoed in notions of 'revolutionary families', i.e., families with history of participating in liberation movements expect children to do the same because these lifestyle and habitual dispositions have been constructed by family history.

It can be seen, then, that family everyday life itself is not apolitical. On the contrary, as noted by Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss (2017a), family is one of the most suitable contexts for political socialisation precisely because of trust and intimate bonds between family members. Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss (2017a) also noted that children can be the ones initiating talking about politics. At other times, political talk takes place between adults while the children play nearby, which gives children an opportunity to listen; however, as mentioned above, they often also make sense of it, thus becoming 'active generators of their own social and cultural capital in early years settings' (Gabriel, 2017). Through this process, even in simple practices such as eating together, historical consciousness and political identities are made (Nolas, Varvantakis & Aruldoss, 2017a, p. 80).

Families can also be conceptualised as political because they are instrumental in reproducing social change and nation-building (Kallio & Hakli, 2011). Similar arguments are articulated in Pred (2017), who criticised the notion of society as a string of separate events – rather, a society, for him, was an 'agglomeration of all existing institutions' – including family – and the practices within them. As such, everyday mundane activities associated with family, perpetuate existing social practices (Pred, 2017). Further, families derive the norms and values from their social networks. Family structures and traditions – whether women go to work, how the resources are shared, etc. – shift accordingly to the social and political contexts (Razavi, 2013). The concept of childhood itself is an example of this – what constitutes a good childhood, their role and relationship with adults is culturally specific. This highlights, then, that understanding children as connected and affected by their social environments – especially family – can again help us move beyond the idea of child soldiers as fully self-interested independent agents. It can also uncover the habitus that children acquire since early childhood and how it, in turn, reflects the social environments that the children grew up in.

2.5.2 Schools and peer communities

Unlike family life, the role of schools as political institutions has been explicitly acknowledged. Education, from the perspective of critical pedagogy scholars, is always political – 'teaching and learning are political processes' (Roberts, 2015, p. 2). Roberts (2013) conceptualises the political nature of education as seen in everything: the views of teachers and students, forms of

assessment, what is included or left out in the curriculum, the government policies that inform education, what values and attitudes are transmitted etc. Freire (1970), a prominent writer on critical pedagogy working in Brazil, argued that schools have liberating potential and transform social injustices, recommending, for example, that the revolutionary leaders do not approach the education from top down, but rather in dialogue with peasants. Peasants or urban masses are not to be 'won over' – that is, Freire argues, the language of the oppressors; but should be made aware of their current situation through education.

Bourdieu's concepts themselves have been applied to explore the political and social role of schools and how, rather than spaces for political change, they can reproduce the current order. He writes, for example: 'it may be assumed that every individual owes to the type of schooling he has received a set of basic, deeply interiorised master patterns' (Bourdieu, 1971, p. 192). He also explained school elements such as personal presentation 'serves the purposes of working class exclusion and elite reproduction' (Bourdieu, 1971). In other words, schools shape the habitus as powerfully as family. Some scholars use Bourdieu's approaches to go further in exploring the role of education and schools in reconstructing society and explore the reproductive nature of the education system: for example, Reay (1998) argues that mothers' involvement in education was informed by their own educational experiences; in turn, their involvement reproduced class and gender-based distinctions of parental roles in the child's education. Similarly, Grenfell (2009) believes that, among other things, language used in pedagogic discourse legitimises certain groups of students, while excluding those who do not conform to the vision of an ideal type of student.

Explicit politisation and militarisation of schools is not new. Governments have conceptualised schools as spaces where children form their citizen identity – for example, Caruso (2010) argued that politisation of elementary schools (regulating voting rights through literacy) became vital in postcolonial Hispanic America's shaping of new citizenry. Similarly, schools during The First World War encouraged militarisation of everyday life by asking children to engage in war-related activities and write letters to the front (Cooke, n.d). Zheng (2021) further describes the militarism in Chinese schools before and after 1949, describing how children were exposed to ideological education and encouraged to participate in campaigns which supported the Korean war. We can see, then, how schools can reproduce dominant politics or act as spaces for social change – either way becoming political sites.

It is also important not to neglect the role of informal peer communities around children and their role in political socialisation. Indeed, schoolchildren in the Soviet Union ranked peer groups

as the third agent of socialisation, after core family and school setting (Cary, 1974). The peer group was effective in the political socialisation of children even if it was not an institutionalised political organisation – rather, the issue explored here was the 'teen culture' that guided the lives of Soviet school children. Whether playing with their friends, meeting neighbours, or conversing with their peers at school – children are again, not outside of the political realm. In fact, 'perhaps one of the foremost functions of the peer group is to transmit the culture of the wider society of which it is a part' (Langton, 1967, p. 752). Langton also observes: 'If he [a child] enters a school peer group composed of students from the same social class, this may act to reinforce as well as elaborate the class attitudes and expectations learned in the family' because they can reward those who conform with attention, leadership, and approval. The active change of political socialisation was shown by Campos, Heap and de Leon (2017) who argued that peer groups do not reinforce initial beliefs of children; indeed, the two correlate weakly with each other. Rather, students tended to change their political stances if their peer group is politically engaged – that is, politically engaged students discuss politics more, thus informing their friends on the political situation.

What the findings and arguments above show, then, is that schools and peer communities play an important role in political socialisation of children and shape their habitus powerfully. Whether they transmit lessons about common national identity, importance of one's citizenship, or role of children in society – all of these take part in shaping the children's predisposition to later join a military struggle.

2.5.3 Child labour

Having established that communities around children – family, peer networks, and schools – are political, this section aims to analyse the effect of norms in wider society on children's actions. To do so, I examine the literature on child labour which, as shown by Shepler (2014), like child soldiering, is often seen as unchildlike in part because it is a type of work; and childhood, according to the dominant narratives, should be a work-free space. However, according to Liebel (2004), the perspective of childhood coming from the Global South gives insight into an alternative attitude towards child labour – one that demonstrates how work contributes to them being responsible members of society and their ability to establish relationships. Much like child soldiering, child labour is a space where agency and structure intertwine, where it is difficult to establish whether children are truly 'free' to choose to work.

From a relational perspective, the importance of children's connections to their own societies also cannot be ignored for cases of child labour. Huijsmans and Baker (2012) or Berlan (2013) agree that children have agency as individuals, but it is still, to some extent, constrained by household and cultural dynamics. The importance of culture is reflected in Mill's emphasis that the labour of young female migrants is shaped not only by the economic realities of countries where this occurs, but also the cultural resources available to children. As Qvortrup (2004, p. 267) puts it: 'what children do and what is expected from them is largely historically and culturally determined' – and indeed, multiple studies suggest that for many cultures, childhood is constituted not only of learning and playing, but also working. Labour isn't seen as oppressive because in this context, it is seen as a part of being a child. While children demonstrate significant agency and eagerness to work, they would still be predisposed to engage in that practice by the norms of the society they grew up in, which in turn shaped their habitus. Further, the 'norms' do not need to refer only to wide cultural frameworks. Children's actions can also be shaped by 'macrolevel transformations' – for example, siblings leaving to work thus setting a precedent (Huijsmans & Baker, 2012). Some children, then, can be vulnerable to exploitation, but not intrinsically so. Rather, their actions are often a response to the social context and changes within it.

Another part of children's positive outlook towards their labour is being able to contribute to their families (Liebel, 2014). Often children do make a significant contribution to society itself and their work brings significant income for their households (Lancy, 2015). Thus, children often undertake different jobs not to pursue their own economic gain, but as a gesture to help their relatives. In Camacho's survey (1999), 42% of children surveyed cited this as the main reason to work. Further, poverty and wages, which are the most commonly cited reasons for child labour and child migration, do not provide enough information about the nature of work that children participate in – rather, this is much better explained by socialisation (Camacho, 1999). The questions may include: is there previous history of child labour in the family? What kind of jobs do they do? These norms and values are transmitted to children and shape their subsequent choices.

The literature on child labour, then, makes two arguments which are less prominent in literature on child soldiering: firstly, whether an activity is unchildlike or not is determined by context-related norms. Within the contexts that many children are operating, economic activities that contribute to their family's life are seen as positive. This also confirms Shepler's findings that many child soldiers are operating in a context where child labour defined good childhood – and child soldiering, in turn, was conceptualised as a form of child labour (Shepler, 2014). Secondly, the literature also shows that some of the main motivations for the children to engage in child

labour are connected with the desire and obligation to contribute to their community. Their connection with wider society, further, cannot be discarded if we want to examine more specifically the kinds of work that children engaged in. Both of these insights can be usefully implemented in my research.

2.5.4 Children as political actors

Given the emphasis that this thesis makes on the importance of incorporating political as well as cultural factors into analysis of child soldiering, this section will challenge the idea that politics and childhood are incompatible. Conceptualising an alternative reading of children requires uncovering their place in political life, rather than separating them from politics entirely and treating them as citizens in waiting (Nolas, Varvantakis, Aruldoss, 2017b). From the caretaker perspective, the idea of children having a political life itself is a surprise (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). However, as Kallio and Häkli note, from a relational perspective, the idea that children are somehow separate from politics is 'absurd', viewing 'politics as a pervasive aspect of human life and political identities as socially embedded' (2011, p. 4). There are instances of children, for example, wearing election badges or reciting the pledge of allegiance or singing the national anthem. Children talk about politics with their friends, listen to political presentations and volunteer for political organisations (Torney-Purta, 2017). It is true that this type of children's political participation is often poorly informed – they may not understand elections or communism – however, as Torney-Purta points out, adult participation in politics is often similarly uninformed. What it does highlight, however, is the presence of politics in children's lives since very early childhood and how it affects children in almost every other aspect of their lives – consciousness, morality, and ways of thinking (Scheper-Hughes & Sargent, 1998). Further, the political narratives are not passively received but actively incorporated into the everyday culture by children themselves, negotiated and constructed using the cultural resources available to them (Nolas, Varvantakis & Aruldoss, 2017a).

The idea of children participating in political struggles is not unthinkable once one considers that in many social contexts, children willingly engage in politics and do consider themselves and others to be significant political actors. This is observed to be more frequent 'in some of the emerging countries of the South than in the well-established democracies of the North' (Matthews, Limb, Taylor, 1999, p. 142). For example, in Brazil and Argentina the potential political involvement of children was acknowledged by reducing the voting age to sixteen (Arnett, 2015). It is in the Global South that studies and projects have succeeded in 'bringing children's everyday

lives together with large-scale geopolitical and economic phenomena, recognising children as active members of their communities and societies' (Kallio, 2008). This again reveals that in many models, politics is seen as part of childhood; political contexts do not happen around children without their active involvement. Multiple interviews further suggest that children's awareness of politics is more complex than often credited. Children's lack of participation in more formal political establishments has been connected to the lack of opportunities to do so, rather than them being inherently apolitical. When children are given more responsibilities and opportunities to engage with society, they are willing to do so, as shown in the rising membership of young people in single-issue organisations such as Amnesty International, Greenpeace, and Friends of the Earth (Matthews & Gardiner, 2002).

However, as Kallio and Hakli (2010) highlight, children need not participate in formal institutions to be political; indeed, the idea that childhood is inherently apolitical is shaped by an artificial separation of the social and the political. Politics and political identity, as explored above, are also constituted in everyday environments such as family, schools, and communities. Within these informal spaces, young people inevitably play important roles as competent actors (Skelton, 2010). In these cases, scholars such as Kallio and Hakli (2010) define the political as embedded in power relations and point out that children, then, *are* political: they are aware of the power differences between themselves and other people; they have their own responsibilities and interests, which in turn lead to different ways of negotiating power relations. For example, even in nurseries, toddlers learn to take control of space and time around themselves, adapt to the adults' demands of proper behaviour, and discover that they can, to an extent, manipulate rules and other toddlers to achieve their interest (Gallacher, 2005). Kallio and Hakli (2010) further observe that these actions of working around the system can be reconceptualised as children's political agency. In turn, it can also be observed that children's agency is intertwined with the adults' political worlds. It is important to recognise their political role further because in uncovering their political everyday life helps to understand difficult battles they may need to fight – for example, when encountering racial struggles at school (Nakata, 2008, p. 20; Thomas, 2009).

Reading children as political subjects is in line with Bourdieu's theory of social fields and thus 'brings children out of social and political otherness', acknowledging them as political agents in their own right (Kallio, 2008). This highlights that despite the frequent stereotype of children as apolitical, this is not the case for many children. In fact, children are affected by and affect their relationships with family, friends, teachers, and wider society (Hill & Tisdall, 2014). Hill and Tisdall further note that the relationships between children and adults shape the experiences of children,

and these, in turn, shape the expectations about the appropriate role and nature of childhood within these communities (Hill & Tisdall, 2014). As such, children are not citizens in waiting – they can be conceptualised as socially connected and influential in their own way. As the children grow up, socialise, and take various responsibilities, many are likely to absorb some political attitudes into their habitus. Their eventual decision to take part in armed political struggle should be understood in this context.

2.6. Children in war: a Bourdieusian perspective

The question that this thesis explores, then, is how children's decisions to participate in war were shaped by their habitus and field – both of which are a result of both the ongoing war as well as social context surrounding childhood. Some authors have already applied the Bourdieu-inspired framework to studying children in war. In doing so, they reveal different complexities of childhood and move away from the idea of children as rational agents exercising free choice. It is through analysing their experiences in the context of their structure that Coulter, for example, states that the question is 'never about having or not having agency', and that it was obvious that not all girl fighters in her study were victimised. Rather, she notes that 'even with a gun in hand, my informants' choices were circumscribed – by convention, tradition, morality, religion, family, or fear' (Coulter, 2008, p. 68).

The 'third way' offered by Bourdieu is helpful in conceptualising war as a social field to be navigated by children. If a child is born into war, Rosenoff (2010) argues, their decisions and behaviour, will be informed by the realities of society and its rules that the children need to adhere to in order to survive. These behaviours may not make sense outside of their context, but are in line with what the children have learned in early childhood, i.e., with their habitus. A more detailed exploration of the habitus of violence is detailed in Velitchkova's (2021) model, who outlined how children adopt moral justifications and behavioural templates of violence through family and peers without consciously trying to do so, and imitate them in similar situations (e.g. when under threat of violence). Through this process, violent 'traditions' are passed down between people and generations. The cases of child soldiers reflect this model. For example, Ishmael Beah (2007) retells the experience of being exposed to violence, attacks, death, and afterwards taking up arms when having to do so. Since the children were already exposed to violence, they know how to do it when put in a situation that calls for it; Velitchkova suggests that this previous exposure is the

key element in deciding whether child soldiers engage in violence, rather than moral commitment or hatred of the enemy.

Child soldiering can be a consequence not only of war and violence, but also of the social context surrounding one's childhood. I have described earlier how in some models of childhood, children are not seen as apolitical or inherently unable to work. Shepler (2014), operating from a similar assumption, stressed the importance of understanding the everyday life of children. She positioned the phenomenon of child soldiering in different aspects of childhood in Sierra Leone which are continuous with child soldiering. She reveals, for example, that many children in Sierra Leone are expected to work and contribute to their family from a young age – labour is an essential part of a good childhood, and most people are open about their own work. When working for the Revolutionary United Front in Sierra Leone, the children did tasks that were in line with their peacetime daily responsibilities, such as fetching water. Even when doing more violent things, such as shooting guns, the children were 'doing it within a system in which it made sense for children to work alongside adults' (Shepler, 2014, p. 32). In addition, in the framework of Sierra Leonean childhood that Shepler explored, children do not necessarily need to live with their biological parents. As such, while the process of abduction is traumatic, the specific trauma of being removed from their biological parents in order to participate in armed conflict does not exist in the same way in Sierra Leone as often imagined in the West. Instead, the rebels were seen as a foster family – a practice common in West Africa.

From these studies we can see that the formation of children's habitus can provide a more nuanced insight to child soldiers' actions, i.e., the children's subjective and active decisions, but also how their decisions were socially and structurally determined. The phenomenon of child soldiering, then, will be influenced by various aspects – family influence, prevailing norms around political significance of children and their ability to contribute to the community. It is likely to be further influenced by the presence of violence, and children's involvement in it as a logical response to the realities in which they live. All of these factors are likely to be significant since the children's early years and be present as they grow up and make the decision to join the political struggle. The notions of habitus and field, besides providing us with a tool to move away from an individualistic and agent-centric approach, also allow us to trace these historical wider processes that affected the children's later behaviour. In order to gain a holistic and complex perspective on child soldiering, the child soldier habitus and their relations with their environment will be the focal point of this research. Conceptualisations such as these can be especially relevant to voluntary recruitment.

While it can be argued that children are predisposed to make the decision to join the military efforts by the social context, there are also instances in which children go to great lengths to join armed movements by lying and planning elaborate schemes in order to escape their families. Similarly, there are instances of children going beyond their assigned roles during combat, and carrying out jobs with pride, creativity and enjoyment. Records of these children are less common but do exist. For example, the case of George Collett, who lied about his age to participate in World War 1 (Smart, 2018), or John Cook who won Medal of Honour at 15 in the US Civil War when he 'single-handedly carried out the job of a four-man gun crew' despite his initial work as a messenger (Singer, 2006, p. 13). Cortes and Buchanan (2007) further explore instances of children who operated under Colombian guerrilla groups and did not exhibit any signs of trauma, but rather were empowered by their experience. Bourdieu's concepts can reveal, by tracing the trajectory of the children's personal and social histories, how these instances have come to exist.

2.7. Conclusion

The theoretical and conceptual framework of this thesis draws on Bourdieu and a range of Bourdieusian studies. In doing so, I move away from substantive approaches which conceptualise children either as agents exercising free will, or victims who are passively shaped by circumstances around them. I therefore approach children as social actors who affect and are affected by their social environment. To this end, I employ a relational approach conceptualising agents and structure and co-constituting. More specifically, I employ Bourdieu's analytical tools of field, habitus, and capital in order to trace and analyse how children's experiences and motivations are a product of communities around them, their personal histories, and internal worlds. I argue that these thinking tools will be particularly helpful in understanding and navigating the embodied social practices that are taken for granted and therefore often not explicitly articulated.

Doing so requires understanding of children not as apolitical and supposedly innocent 'becomings', but as deeply social and political beings; I approach their agency as rooted in wider cultural, political, and social structure. I argue that their motivations and decisions are particularly dependent on two factors: ongoing militarisation of their everyday life and the local expectations of childhood. They need particular attention because, to child soldiers, they are likely to be simply part of their life; as a result, such realities are unlikely to be articulated explicitly. With the

understanding that these phenomena are social practices, I will be able to analyse my data more deeply.

Firstly, this thesis understands ideology as a social practice. This is because ideologies are, by definition, normative, frequently articulated as objectively true and therefore legitimate. As a result, they are a powerful force which guides individuals' actions, giving them an understanding of what is thinkable, desirable, honourable. Wars, similarly, are a social process with their own rules: if individuals are exposed to wars and witness that certain ways of acting will ensure their survival, they are more likely to do so. Further, wars propel certain forms of capital as more desirable than others, again therefore providing actions (such as taking up arms) with their own internal logic which may not make sense outside of their context. Yet, considering ideology and ongoing militarisation can provide significant insights into experiences and motivations of child soldiers.

Secondly, I have approached childhood as deeply social. This thesis understands children as political actors. This is an important conceptualisation because this thesis also considers the impact of ideology and militarisation; further, approaching children as political will help me to understand their interaction with ideology and ongoing civil war even if they do not articulate it explicitly. I further point out that schools and family, even though they are frequently understood as apolitical, can be spaces for political socialisation and predisposition. Again, this is an important aspect to keep in mind when collecting and analysing data because families of child soldiers are frequently described as broken or dysfunctional; yet, as previous research has pointed out, they can serve as powerful political motivators precisely because they are full of affection. Lastly, I understand childhood as a space not only for play, but also for labour; doing so provided me with a framework to understand why and how children can engage with seemingly 'unchildlike' activities.

Overall, this theoretical framework has provided me with useful thinking tools and conceptualisations of children. Combining insights from research on civil wars and childhood studies, as well as existing Bourdieusian studies on child soldiers, has helped me to hone my own analytical framework with regards to child soldier habitus; in particular, it revealed that child soldiers' actions are always affected by various layers of history, politics, and personal relations. A relational approach further will inform my methodology and the methods I will use to gather and analyse my data. These will be outlined in detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Method and methodology

3.1. Introduction

This chapter lays out and explains the research process I will adopt in this thesis. It addresses my methodology, method, and reflects on the process of data collection and analysis. As the primary source of knowledge is derived from the collection of life histories, I employ case study methodology and qualitative data analysis. Doing so allows me to achieve two aims. Firstly, I respond to the calls to attend to children's agency in research design as outlined in my literature review and conceptual framework. Secondly, such a methodology is compatible with my theoretical and conceptual framework, which highlights how children's everyday experiences, personal histories, and social conditions influence their decisions to take up arms, their conduct during conflict and the way they negotiate their environment post conflict. In the following sections, I outline specifically how my research tools enhance the aims and theoretical underpinnings of this thesis.

To this end, the chapter is structured as follows. Firstly, I explain and justify the principles of qualitative research, which guide my research process. Secondly, I explain my methodology, which is a case study. Thirdly, I outline the method I have applied to my research: life history interviews. Afterwards, I explain the logistics of my fieldwork, including sampling procedure, interview process, and some reflections on the fieldwork.

A Bourdieu-inspired framework also stresses the importance of reflexivity throughout the research process (Jacob, 2015). As such, the next parts of this chapter outline my positionality and how it affected the research process. I demonstrate that in some ways, it has made my research easier; however, there are also ways in which my background and social position could have affected the process negatively. I then describe the ways in which I have sought to mitigate these effects.

Afterwards, I reflect on the way in which I have analysed the data that has been gathered. Again, working with a Bourdieusian framework, I demonstrate that the aim of my research is to achieve the 'truth of understanding'. My data analysis has sought to ensure that there is a coherent story which at the same time lays out accurately the internal logic of practice of my interviewees. I reflect on how my processes of transcription, translation, and presentation of data

were carried out with this assumption in mind. I describe how, while sensitive to the 'multiple truths' that my interviewees presented to me, I employed techniques and tools to mitigate biases and misrepresentations. I lastly reflect on the issues of memory and how the silences, omissions, and 'forgotten' information are valuable data in themselves, giving the researcher insight into what is normal, thinkable, or desirable.

3.2. Qualitative research

As Kawulich and Chilisa (2012) point out, there are multiple approaches to social research, with quantitative and qualitative research approaches being the most prominent. Choosing the suitable approach is important because it will affect the methods of data collection and analysis. When considering the most appropriate approach, the researcher must consider the ultimate aims of the research project and the objects of analysis (Bahari, 2012; Busetto, Wick, & Gumbinger, 2020). In the following section, I will explain the two approaches to research and my choice of qualitative approach.

The quantitative approach, as Steckler et. al (1992) explain, is adopted from physical sciences. This approach includes statistical techniques, experimental and quasi-experimental designs to collect numerical data on a population sample or a sample of program participants and nonparticipants. The researcher is assumed to be studying the social phenomenon from a distance in order to maximise presumed objectivity of the research process (Draper, 2004). The data collected is focused on 'precise and objective measurements', often with limited space for open-ended questions and exploration of elaborate answers (Campbell, 2014, p. 3). Campbell further continues to outline the aims of such research, which is to produce 'generalizable, predictable' results (Campbell, 2014, p. 3). A more elaborate definition is offered by Yilmaz (2013, p. 311):

> [Quantitative research] can be defined as research that explains phenomena according to numerical data which are analysed by means of mathematically based methods, especially statistics. From a broader perspective, it can be defined as a type of empirical research into a social phenomenon or human problem, testing a theory consisting of variables which are measured with numbers and analysed with statistics in order to determine if the theory explains or predicts phenomena of interest.

On the other hand, the underlying assumption of qualitative research is that social phenomena 'are so complex and interwoven that they cannot be reduced to isolated variables' (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 311). Defined by Gelling (2015, p. 43), 'Qualitative research is an approach to scientific inquiry that allows researchers to explore human experiences in personal and social contexts, and gain greater understanding of the factors influencing these experiences'. This stands in contrast to the earlier definition of quantitative research, which seeks to explain, predict, and generalise, rather than explore and understand (see Stake, 1995, for more elaborate explanation of the differences between quantitative and qualitative research). In Jackson, Drummond, and Camara's (2007, p. 22) words, the focus of qualitative research is understanding 'human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences'. This is manifested in relying on in-depth responses from interviewees, rather than 'finite questions to elicit categorized, forced-choice responses with little room for open-ended replies' (Jackson, Drummond & Camara, 2007, p. 22). Relying on data sources such as open-ended interviews, diaries, narrated content etc., qualitative research often presents elaborate, detailed, and rich descriptions of the phenomena under investigation (Steckler, McLeroy, Goodman, Bird & Cormick, 1992). An example from Erickson (2017, p. 87) helps to differentiate the two: 'The qualitative researcher first asks, "What are the kinds of things (material and symbolic) to which people in this setting orient as they conduct everyday life?" The quantitative researcher first asks, "How many instances of a certain kind are there?"'

In qualitative research, therefore, researchers approach the object of their study as 'value-laden, flexible, descriptive, holistic, and context sensitive' (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 312); they 'immerse themselves' in the phenomenon they are studying (Steckler et.al, 1992, p. 2). In other words, as Rossman & Rallis (2003, p. 9) state, 'Qualitative researchers go to the people; they do not extricate people from their everyday worlds' (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 9). The goal is to 'elicit an "insider's" view' of the studied subject (Steckler et. al, 1992, p. 2), often following it over an extended period of time. Doing so helps the researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of people's lives or experiences 'without resorting to standardised, pre-determined categories of analysis' (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313); it is this open-endedness that lets the researchers understand the world from the perspective and viewpoint of the individuals they are studying. By contrast, quantitative research, while allowing researchers to obtain broad and generalisable findings, does not 'provide insight into the participants' individual or personal experiences', nor is it usually the aim of a quantitative study (Yilmaz, 2013, p. 313).

One important aspect of qualitative research has been highlighted by Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 43): it involves researchers 'attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'. This flows from the assumption that human behaviour cannot be explained in terms of quantifiable (e.g. biological, statistical) mechanisms. Rather, as Draper (2004, p. 643) states, 'human action is seen as infused with meaning in terms of intentions, motives, beliefs, social rules and values, and that these factors must be taken into account in both understanding and explaining it.' In turn, an understanding of these interactions and social rules can only be achieved by engaging with individuals' internal worlds themselves. This point is echoed by Busetto, Wick and Gumbinger (2020), who similarly suggest that qualitative research concerns itself with opinions and subjective experiences of individuals, how they experience and make sense of their everyday activities. Doing so means that researchers record detailed analysis of the participants' answers, descriptions of events and interactions, afterwards using quotes from people about their experiences and thoughts (rather than, for example, statistical analyses of measurable data).

In addition, qualitative research focuses on a specific context of a phenomenon, locating the phenomenon within a contextual window; on the other hand, quantitative research has been articulated by Libarkin and Kurdziel (2002) to focus on generalisations which could be applied to a wide range of contexts. The following explanation by Patton (as cited in Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) is particularly helpful in explaining the importance of specificity of context in qualitative research (also highlighting the importance of understanding a phenomenon, rather than predicting):

[Qualitative research] is an effort to understand situations in their uniqueness as part of a particular context and the interactions there. This understanding is an end in itself, so that it is not attempting to predict what may happen in the future necessarily, but to understand the nature of that setting – what it means for participants to be in that setting, what their lives are like, what's going on for them, what their meanings are, what the world looks like in that particular setting… the analysis strives for depth of understanding.

Qualitative researchers, then, emphasise how important settings are in shaping everyday actions, meanings, and experiences; and how this interaction between environment and people is 'complex, dynamic, and multifaceted' (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 9). Noblit and Engel (1999) further underline that in qualitative research, it is important not to focus on a few aspects of the

wider context but put all of them together and elaborate them within their own contexts, e.g. belief systems or social trends. Such a description of phenomena, locating it in the wider structures and depicting meanings attributed to a phenomenon within a specific context is referred to as 'thick description' (as laid out by Geertz, 1993, p. 9). An accompanying 'thick description' of a phenomenon is important for qualitative studies precisely because of this approach's emphasis on understanding specifics of wider context.

The aim of this thesis is to provide a deep and detailed narrative understanding of child soldiering in the Vietnam War. I aim to understand children's experiences: why they joined the guerrillas, what were their everyday lives like and how they shaped the children's experiences, and how children interpret their own participation in the military conflict. As outlined in my conceptual framework and literature review, I am also interested in the role that contextual factors such as family, sociocultural practices and political ideology played in shaping children's lives and experiences. The goal of my research is to produce rich and detailed data which allows the reader and the researcher to understand, rather than predict, the courses of action and lifeworlds of former Vietnamese child soldiers. To this end, this study has adopted a qualitative method, which brings to light and attempts to understand the meanings an experience has for the subject. Such an approach will be especially helpful in detecting the social conditions within which certain actions take place, individual agency, and experience, making it a preferrable approach to quantitative analyses.

3.3. Case study methodology

Methodology is the bridge that brings theory and method, perspective and tool, together (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The methodology that is most in line with this study's aim to explore child soldiering in its complexity, particularity and uniqueness is case study research – characterised by Tellis (1997, n.p.) as an 'ideal methodology when a holistic, in-depth investigation is needed'. Tellis (1997) goes on further to state that when the research needs to bring out details from the 'insiders' viewpoint, case study is the most appropriate methodology to utilise. As Nije and Asimiran (2014, p. 37) point out, if the researcher desires to understand 'complex social phenomena' in a way that enables a deep and meaningful understanding of the subject, the need for a case study arises. The case study I investigate is the case of child soldiering in the Vietnam

War. In this section, I will further explain the choice for the case study methodology and why it fits with my Bourdieusian framework.

As Gerring (2004, p. 341) defines it, a 'case study is […] an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon)'. He continues to give an example of a 'unit': a nation-state, revolution, political party, among others. Because a case study focuses on an in-depth study of one phenomenon over a period of time, it permits a study of actions, relationships, or attitudes or motives. This is in line with the aims of qualitative research as I have outlined above – to present rich data in context. Perry (2011, p. 221) notes that case studies are especially helpful when the initial theoretical assumption stresses the social meanings that are attached to individuals' actions and relationships:

> If the world we live in is one that can only be understood intersubjectively, through understanding the world as it is constructed through the meanings and interpretations given to it by different actors in the lifeworld, then it [the case study] becomes a method through which to describe and understand the rich, complex sets of interrelationships between different social interests.

For Perry (2011, p. 221) '[a] case study of a single phenomenon… Allows the observer to examine social action in its most complete form. The investigator is better able to grasp the total complex world of social action as it unfolds' (emphasis added). Perry further asserts that a good case study should provide an insight into actors' motives and how they affect, and are affected by, events and social contexts. To achieve this, the researcher should be sensitive to the 'richness and subtle nuances of the social world', approaching it with an assumption that actors are not uniform and simplistic (Orum, Feagin, & Sjoberg, 1991, p. 23). Overall, then, the case study methodology requires researchers to employ multiple methods to gather information; to trace the development of the studied phenomenon over a period of time; or to use various sources of data collection in order to produce detailed and in-depth data on the subject of study (Stake, 1995). As such, since the aim of this study is to understand the social field and the historical conditions that have contributed to child soldiers' decision to take up arms, and their subsequent experience, in-depth case study methodology provides the most suitable tools to do so.

This methodology also fits with Bourdieusian approaches as Bourdieu himself undertook case studies of Algeria and Kabyle people when developing his theories of habitus and field (Bourdieu,

2000; Bourdieu, 1977). It was his in-depth exploration of precapitalist Algeria and the effects of French colonisation on it that allowed him to conceptualise the economic habitus of Algerian workers. Bourdieu-inspired studies on children in war such as Shepler (2014), Rosenoff (2010), and Jacob (2013) have also used case study methodology and in doing so, traced relationships in which children are embedded in their respective social contexts, thus providing an in-depth insight into the children's lives, their motivations, and realities. They do not explain their choice of case study methodology, but Grenfell and James (1998), in a Bourdieusian study from education studies, has reflected on their choice. As they point out:

In many respects, case studies offer an excellent opportunity to research in a Bourdieuian way. Case studies of individuals indicate particular habitus constituents and life trajectories. Individuals are also always positioned in some field or other at any one time and place. There is then the possibility of researching the interaction between habitus and field in empirical terms (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 174; emphasis added).

Grenfell and James further go on to explain that a case study was most in line with the Bourdieusian approach because it 'reflected an interest in the subjective meanings held by actors'; they specifically outline that they wanted to arrive at a 'situated understanding of […] experiences' which would otherwise be lost in 'researcher-defined categories (Grenfell & James, 1998, p. 110). Following Grenfell and James' observations that case study methodology is highly suitable for a Bourdieusian framework, I have employed this methodology in my own research. As outlined by scholars such as Perry and Gerring, who I have referenced above, I utilise the case study methodology specifically in order to achieve an in-depth, multifaceted understanding of the phenomenon of child soldiering.

3.4. Life history interviews method

3.4.1 Life history interviews

Methods are the tools a researcher uses to gather data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011); for qualitative research, these often include interviews, ethnography, text analysis etc. For this research, I collected life history interviews – a method that elicits life narratives and describes a person's life (Bertaux, 1981). The method asks participants to recount their own life, or a series

of events over a certain period, in their own words and from their own perspective. Because of its focus on past as well as present events, a life history approach helps to uncover the ways a person's identity was shaped in childhood and adolescence, and thus provides insights into the development of specific courses of actions and beliefs. Through this method, it is also possible to trace how important events or fundamental life changes altered a person's sense of self and their relationships (Denov & Maclure, 2007). In doing so, this method explores the 'unfolding history of one person's experiences', and further that person's social roles, relations, and self-conception throughout the transitions from one experience to another (Abu Bakar & Abdullah, 2008, p. 4). The underlying premise of this method falls in line with that of Bourdieu and other relational researchers: for example, Erick's (2002) justification for using this method stresses that ways of acting are grounded in personal life histories. The life history method can be valuable when investigating the context in which decisions such as joining the army were made. As a result, it helps to locate the individual's personal stories in a broader social history – the local contexts and structures, as well as the cultural circumstances (Caplan, 1997). This method, for example, has been used by Söderström (2016) to uncover how the political lives of ex-combatants in Colombia were affected by societal processes during the country's transition from war towards peace; or by Linden and Klandermans (2007) to trace the identity formations of Dutch right-wing extremists.

A particularly detailed study of child soldiers in Sierra Leone using the life history method was conducted by Denov and Maclure (2007). They advocate for the usefulness of this approach specifically for the study of former child soldiers, citing several reasons. The first is that of marginality. In the words of Abu Bakar and Abdullah (2008), since the life history method 'underlined the importance of listening to the voices of the subject', and aims to engage with the individuals' experience on a deep level (2008, p. 4), it thus provides a tool for telling the stories of marginalised populations, that would otherwise not be told. Denov and Maclure note that Sierra Leonean child soldiers 'are usually rendered largely voiceless […] rarely able to publicly articulate their experiences' (2007, p. 247). In adopting the life histories method, they were able to record the first-hand accounts of children's stories and understand how the children perceived their experiences. The second reason is that due to its depth and richness, they could combat the 'pathologising' discourses around child soldiers. This is because in providing both context and history to decisions avoids essentialising the child soldiers and reducing their decisions to simplistic reasons. Lastly, Denov and Maclure argue that the life histories approach is effective in 'understanding the stark transitions' in the complex processes of militarisation and demilitarisation – again, due to its focus on the turning points and changes throughout the participants' lives.

Denov and Maclure's paper recounted not only a detailed descriptive account of child soldiering, but a specific attempt to describe the uncertainty and the changing nature of child soldier experience, especially in the contexts of militarisation and demilitarisation (Denov & Maclure, 2007, p. 258). It led them to conclude that the life histories method captured the child soldier life experiences within the Sierra Leonean context.

The reasons for conducting a life history study, then, centre around the method's focus on change, social contexts, personal histories, and how events in the past can affect actions in the present – all of which are crucial if we are to fully understand the experiences of child soldiers. It further allows the researcher to bring forth deep and detailed subjective accounts of a person's experiences. As such, life history interviews align well with the Bourdieusian approach that my study takes, and therefore this is the method I have deployed in my research.

3.4.2 Retrospective interviews and the issue of memory

As has been made clear, this study will employ the retrospective interviews method. As such it is important to be aware that the findings derived from such a method may not be entirely reliable and accurate because, as Sturken points out, remembering goes 'in tandem' with forgetting (1997, p. 7). It is inevitable that some things are forgotten as part of human experience; what an individual remembers, in the end, is a consequence of a highly selective process in which reality can become subjective (Sturken, 1997). The issue of selective remembering, omitting, and forgetting, is particularly relevant to this study because the memories of my interviewees were formed during war, violence, and in often very intense circumstances. This, in turn, has many complicated implications: for example, Mosse (1991, p. 7) recounts instances of World War 1 memories being transformed and manipulated to become more romanticised, to be seen as a 'meaningful and even sacred event as a way for veterans to make sense and justify their experience'. On the other hand, research from psychologists suggests that memories of traumatic events can sometimes impair memory formation – for example, by forming in disjointed fragments, rather than a coherent episode (Nadel & Jacobs, 1998).

Nevertheless, the aim of this study was not to produce an account of historically accurate facts, but to understand the experiences and perceptions of former child soldiers themselves. As such, it was also important to trace *how* the memories were articulated by the interviewees. The main goal is not to evaluate the memories based on their accuracy, but approach them as 'forms of

action', which are to be evaluated on their own terms. In this vein, Holstein and Gubrium (2003) claim that memory is not just an individual act; it is also a collective one – it is shaped, and therefore can illuminate 'what is thinkable and what is not, what is counted as appropriate, what is valued, what is noteworthy' (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003, p. 118). What my interviewees choose to tell me, along with what they omit, is indicative of specific cultural perceptions surrounding childhood and war. They therefore can provide valuable information with regards to expectations and social practices of child soldiering.

Keightley (2010, p. 56) further argues that although there are empirical problems, the value of memory goes beyond being able to confirm historical truths. The process of making sense of experience and ascribing meaning to memories – whether they are influenced by collective experiences, conventions or cultural norms – holds as much significance for research as does historical empirical evidence. In turn, individual memories also contribute to wider cultural frameworks, enabling people to build relationships, identity, and to affiliate with a specific group. Retrospective interviews and the memories are a source of valuable information, as their recounted experiences will still illuminate the interviewees', and the communities', ideas of good and bad childhood and the role of children in wars. In the end, then, whether or not memory is objectively true, it will not obstruct understanding the experiences of child soldiers but can add to the stories by revealing how these events were responded to and perceived, both on an individual and collective level.

3.5. Data collection process

The life history interviews took place across various cities and villages in North, Central and Southern Vietnam. I conducted interviews with 32 people (19 men, 13 women). I have also been able to converse with people who participated in the guerrilla movements in the earlier war of independence with France. The information they provided me with has helped me to gain a deeper understanding of the social context preceding the Vietnam War. I therefore used their responses as additional source of information to understand the social and historical context of the Viet Cong child soldiers. Some of their responses to my questions will be referenced in footnotes. All of my interviewees were former child soldiers who started working with the guerrilla groups before the age of 18, performing a diverse range of tasks and jobs (full interviewee profiles are shown in

Appendix A). All of them were children at the beginning of the war who had grown up in a peasant, rural environment. They were also representatives of the Vietnamese largest ethnic group – Kinh.

While the participation of children in the guerrilla groups is a known fact in Vietnam, the records of children working with the counterinsurgency are much less common. It is possible that the Vietnamese sources on these issues were destroyed when the Viet Cong won. However, even in Western sources, allusions to child soldiers working with guerrillas are much more common than children working with the American forces (e.g. Appy, 1993). It seems that the recruitment of children was a much less common occurrence for the American forces. Further, support for the colonial regimes is generally regarded as negative in modern Vietnam – meaning former supporters are reluctant to talk about it. As such, it was much more difficult to gather access to these interviewees. Further, there are records of communists killing supporters of the American regime (Hodal, 2015), meaning that living in Vietnam was dangerous for them. Therefore, these people were more likely to become refugees and resettle in America through special programs such as Operation New Life/Arrivals, which was the US programme to support those closely associated with the US (Anderson and Silano, 1977). These factors made gaining access to child soldiers who had fought on behalf of forces supporting the colonial regimes more difficult. I thus focused on investigating the experiences of Vietnamese peasant children who participated in the liberation movement with the Viet Cong. Many other groups were involved in the wars: ethnic minorities residing in the mountains, counterinsurgency fighters, children of urban intellectuals who supported or opposed the liberation movement etc. These groups are likely to have different experiences of the war, which will not be represented in this thesis.

My interviewees were recruited to this study via word of mouth, personal connections, and snowball sampling, as well as by means of social media. The interviews ranged from about 1 hour to 2.5 hours. The interviews were arranged so as to be in an environment where interviewees would feel most comfortable (i.e., their personal home, researcher's hotel, or a neutral place such as an office). The questions focused on the interviewees' tasks and jobs, as well as their reasons for participating. Interviewees were free to disclose any information they felt was appropriate. I recorded, transcribed, and translated the interviews into English. I then analysed the interviews and identified the most prominent recurring themes that related to interviewees' recruitment and combat experience.

I further ensured that the research process adhered to the University's ethical guidelines (ethical clearance granted via email by Goldsmiths Politics Department Ethics Officer). All interviewees read and signed a translated consent form. Before the interview, I also explained the purpose of my research and that my interviewees' identity would be confidential. The atmosphere of the interviews was informal, and I generally did not begin the interviews until I was sure that the interviewees were comfortable. As required by ethical guidelines, the names of my interviewees are changed to protect their identity.

While nearly all of my interviews went smoothly, one stood out in particular – a woman saw me talking to an interviewee, who was her employee. She asked me to delete the interview and implied that I was collecting materials for a foreign organisation to portray the Communist Party in an unflattering way and in particular that I was going to present child soldiering as child abuse. I explained that this was historical research, and that these were not the aims of the study; however, she refused to listen to me further stating that since I am not a member of the Party, I would not understand her concerns. I deleted the interview and later called the woman I was interviewing, who afterwards assured me that she was fine, and I should not worry about the incident.

Reflecting on that moment, I find the second woman's use of the expression 'child abuse' particularly interesting. To me, this indicates that the dominant 'victim' narratives around child soldiers now co-exist with the Vietnamese one, and the two may be in conflict. While on the one hand, the majority of my interviewees did not question their own decision, and the decisions of other children to participate in the war, this shows that there is now an awareness of the global human rights discourse and how the history of the country conflicts with it. It is also interesting, however, that the woman was concerned with how the Party would look in the eyes of a foreign Western organisation, rather than in front of their own citizens. Further, it seemed that the woman was concerned with the reputation of the Party, rather than the experiences of the children themselves. This may be a demonstration of how Vietnamese notions of childhood are changing under the influence of global legal and humanitarian frameworks. While it is possible that these notions could have influenced the responses of my interviewees, perhaps without them being consciously aware of it, this can also be interpreted as highlighting how childhood is not an inherently fixed notion, but rather malleable and in constant conversation with various outside forces.

3.6. Reflexivity

An important aspect of my data collection, analysis, and interpretation was reflexivity and positionality. As outlined by Trainor (2012, p. 131), researchers have a responsibility to be reflexive and to provide some 'contextualized discussion of the researchers' position and subjectivities'. This is because, as Power (2004, p. 859) further demonstrates, interviews are not a neutral one-way process, but a constructed relationship – 'a relationship of two people situated in their own, often quite different, positions in social space'. Much like their interviewee, researchers are social actors with their own biographies, which in turn shape their understanding of reality which they strive to study and understand. It is therefore important that researchers 'adopt a critical awareness of his or her own social location in relation to both the research object and process' (Fries, 2009, p. 329). Kenway and McLeod (2004) encourage researchers to *own* the extent to which they are invested in and constructing the research process and production of partial truths. Reflexivity and acknowledgement of the researchers' position and background also allows for a better understanding of the data because the researcher can draw on their experience to analyse the data and make the research process more transparent (Palaganas, Sanchez, Molintas & Caricativo, 2017). As such, in this section I will outline my positionality and how it affected my data collection and interpretation process.

I was raised in Vietnam, and I am therefore familiar with Vietnamese culture, history, and notions of childhood. This meant I was considered to be an 'insider' by my interviewees, as I was able to discuss some of the experiences my interviewees referred to. In this way, I was able to build trust and rapport with my interviewees. Such trust in the relationship between myself and the interviewees made it easier for them to share their own experiences without fear of being judged. This was particularly useful when conducting analysis of my data – in particular, the potential secrecy of my interviewees. This issue has been reflected on by Taylor (1999, p. 163), who recognised that her close Vietnamese friend and informant (a woman who participated in the Vietnam War) always had her guard up and 'rarely let her secrets drop'. Taylor further cites Pike, who assigned this secrecy to the emphasis in Confucian culture on the importance of 'right' roles and relationships. As such, trust is always conditional and subject to change. My background as a Vietnamese person meant I could anticipate this: I grew up with my family consistently pointing out that the preferred manner of speech of Vietnamese people is an indirect one – 'speaking one

thing, thinking another'. I was therefore particularly aware of potential secrecy, half-truths, and veiled statements my interviewees may present to me. I was further aware of the cultural differences within Vietnam itself – for example, Northern people are generally stereotyped to be particularly indirect, which often causes frustration among the Southerners. Like Taylor and Pike, I accepted these possibilities; I asked my interviewees to share only what they were comfortable with. In turn, what they chose to omit is, itself, valuable data, as I have described in the earlier section on memory. To further help me navigate what was left unsaid, I employed a 'thick description' of the responses of my interviewees – which in turn is in line with my theoretical framework, methodology, and method.

My background also resolved some issues with access. On one hand, the issue of underage participation in the war is not a secret in Vietnam – many works of fiction, biographies and public speeches have referred to this; it is normal for veterans to disclose the age in which they first started participating without facing shame or stigmatisation. The information is available and widely known in local communities. On the other hand, participating in war in general is not a topic one would discuss freely with a stranger, and thus, understandably, some people were reluctant to speak about it. However, I found that being a young Vietnamese woman enabled me to gain trust from my interviewees. Many said that the conversation felt like an exchange between them and their children or grandchildren. Others have said that their own grandchildren often did not believe the stories they tell in the way that I, as an 'educated person', did. Others felt that my research would preserve the Vietnamese history for younger generations, since I was a part of it. This, in turn, made them eager to share their stories with me.

For a small number of my interviewees my background as a researcher from a Western university was another factor which made them eager to share their stories with me. The general message was to let the West know that the children were mature, grown up, and intelligent. One interviewee, for example, stressed multiple times in the interview, that he wanted the UK institutions to know that the youngsters who participated in war were well-educated and well-read: 'Let them know that we read a lot of classics, such as Hugo's *Les Misérables*'.

My positionality, however, could also affect my research negatively. Firstly, it potentially left space for giving me false or exaggerated information (even subconsciously) highlighting characteristics that the interviewees deem desirable. I have mitigated this in several ways: firstly, I made it clear that my research is for a PhD thesis, therefore I am gathering my data for academic

purposes. Secondly, I continued to cross-check information across all interviews and secondary sources, to ensure that it is generally consistent. Lastly, their responses, even if exaggerated at times would still be valuable data, as it reveals what they think is desirable, thinkable, and possible. As I explained in the section on memory, people's articulation of their responses still reflects their social context, and therefore can be valuable data in itself. There were also things, such as participating in war, that I was not able to share with my interviewees. To overcome this, I asked clarifying questions and cross-checked them among other interviewees. I am also aware that much like my interviewees, there is a possibility of me taking certain cultural and historical moments for granted, as they were a part of my own, as well as their, life. To counter this, I consistently referred to literature written on Vietnamese culture and Vietnamese conflicts by Western and Vietnamese authors, to gather a deeper understanding of cultural phenomena which might potentially need additional explanation (e.g. Phan, 2006; Pham, 1999; Marr, 2000).

By carrying out research in Vietnamese language and culture – both of which involve constant awareness of a complicated web of social relations – my interviewees and I occupied positions that came with their expectations vis-à-vis each other. This, in turn, inevitably led to both parties adopting a role. Similar notes have been made by Szymańska-Matusiewicz (2013, p. 99), who observed: 'Whenever entering into a Vietnamese-language interaction, speakers are forced to define their own role and its relation to the role of the interlocutor'. In my case, due to my age and the age of my interviewees, I employed the pronoun 'cháu' (niece/granddaughter) when referring to myself and 'cô/chú/bác' (aunt/uncle) for my interviewees.

The usage of informal pronouns had two effects. Firstly, they put me in a subordinate position to my informants. I found, however, that did not hinder my research, but perhaps aided it. Knowing that I am a young researcher lacking first-hand experience with war, my interviewees often clarified certain moments without me asking, sometimes proactively checking my understanding of certain terms they used. I also often asked clarifying questions, which also were seen as expected and even encouraged by my interviewees, given my age and inexperience with war. On the other hand, the kinship pronouns by definition positioned me as an 'insider' in the interviewees' social circle. As such, my interviewees approached me quite informally; our social distance was a close one. In particular, my female informants (who would be put in the position of an 'aunt' or 'grandmother' in our conversation) often held my hand while talking to me or seeing me out, played with my hair, or repeatedly made remarks along the lines of 'So cute!'. My male informants made no such comments, but nevertheless still often compared me to their grandchildren. One

dialogue is particularly memorable: as I was introducing myself and explaining my research to a male interviewee, he asked: 'How old are you?', afterwards mentioning that his grandson was born in the same year as me, and continued listening about my research. Again, I found that such informal relations, and the subsequent expressions of our close social distance, indicated a degree of comfortableness around me. One interviewee further said that he preferred doing an interview with me because it was simple and informal. He said: 'Sometimes journalists and TV stations would come to interview me, and they keep calling me 'ông' [meaning 'grandfather' but in this context, a formal noun to refer to an older male] and referring to themselves as 'tôi' [neutral and formal 'I'], it's strange and distant'. This was particularly important to me as I was interviewing my informants on a sensitive topic. I therefore did not object to using the kinship terms and did not insist on using other formal pronouns.

Overall, then, life history interviews produce knowledge which is constructed by both parties – the researcher and the interviewee. Above, I have outlined the ways in which my positionality may have affected the data I received. However, even if the accumulated data are subjective and not neutral, there is still a need to ensure that interpretations of it are rigorous and comprehensive. I will explain how I analysed my data and mitigated biases in the next section.

3.7. Data analysis and interpretation

After collecting the interviews, I interpreted and analysed the data – 'a dynamic process weaving together recognition of emerging themes, identification of key ideas or units of meaning' (Mohajan, 2018, p. 16). In this section, I will outline my approach to data interpretation and my steps to data analysis.

3.7.1 Data interpretation

Firstly, I will explain my approach to data interpretation. Interview interpretations are directly based on the research data – as Talja (1999, p. 472) points out, the interviews are not 'descriptions of the object of research; they are the object of research' and thus they serve as evidence for the researchers' interpretations. Given the open-ended nature of my questions, the answers are guided by what interviewees feel is important to let me know; thus, the role of the researcher is to identify themes and systematise them into a comprehensible form (Hesse-Biber

& Leavy, 2011). With a good interpretation, as Bondarouk and Ruel (2004, p. 4) argues, 'any absurd behaviours would no longer appear so; new observations would not surprise the researcher and an outside observer to whom the interpretations have been communicated'. To achieve this, exploration of the text and context, must take place (Bondarouk & Ruel, 2004). The interviews are a mutual process, where the speaker gives cues while the listener builds their responses accordingly on the cues and on the context (Gee, 2014, p. 122). In this sense, the two parties engage in building meaning and ways of knowing together, through the process of interpreting and construing.

It follows, then, that qualitative methods are concerned with understanding the phenomenon of study and putting it into its context. Approaching data with this consideration in mind was particularly helpful with Bourdieu's framework. His framework encourages the researcher to 'listen beyond, between, and underneath participants' words' to understand social conditions and internal logic that shape their responses – their gender, culture, or social class (Power, 2004, p. 858). To do so, a Bourdieusian framework would require grasping the details of participants' circumstances and background; putting the researcher in the position of the interviewee to the extent that the respondent's world vision becomes 'self-evident, necessary, taken for granted' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 33). In doing so, the researcher will be able to understand that if they were in the 'shoes' of the participant, it would be 'doubtless' that they would think just like them (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 34).

Power (2004) has investigated the implications of the Bourdieusian framework for the findings of qualitative research. Instead of pursuing hard truth, Power (2004, p. 858) states, such methods offer 'the satisfaction of understanding'. In her words:

> A truth of understanding is a contextualized truth, with no claim to certainty, that, nevertheless, holds the potential to illuminate both the logic of the interview process and the rich, complex social logic of human life. (Power, 2004, p. 864)

In other words, the aim of my data analysis is to arrive at an understanding of what shaped my interviewees' motivations and experiences. McLeod (2003, p. 209) cautions that this aim is not an excuse for an 'anything goes' approach. She therefore urges: 'each account needs to work with its 'evidence', to show *how* one story is possible' (McLeod, 2003, p. 209; emphasis added). The research findings, therefore, need to be harmonious: coherent, layered, and nuanced

(Janesick, 2013). Rubin and Rubin (2011) offer helpful tools to check and balance interview analysis: thoroughness and accuracy. In their book, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*, they provide guidelines which stress transcribing the transcripts accurately and making sure to ask probing questions, considering alternative viewpoints and asking interviewees to reflect on them (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Another tool was proposed by Janesick (2012) – harmony, i.e., making sure that the conclusions are coherent and nuanced.

3.7.2 Data analysis steps

Having established how I approach interpreting my interviews, I will now outline the steps to my data analysis. I have followed Harding's (2019) recommendations in their book *Qualitative Data Analysis: From Start to Finish* which outline a few key steps in qualitative data analysis, e.g., making summaries and identifying key themes. I also kept the considerations of harmony, thoroughness, and 'truth of understanding' as discussed above. With the guidance of this literature, I have analysed my data in the following steps.

Firstly, I have transcribed the recorded interviews verbatim, in addition to making notes on my interviewees' environment – whether they showed me some photos of their childhood, medals, or certificates acknowledging their role in the guerrilla group. This is because, as I have noted above, part of the interpretation of the text is also understanding the context surrounding it. I have chosen to transcribe the interviews myself for two reasons. Firstly, the ethical conditions of this research stated that the raw data will be disclosed only to the myself and my supervisors. Secondly, even with an option to include a transcriber prior to the ethical procedure, I have decided to follow Wellard and McKenna's (2014) observations that when the researcher transcribes their own content, they become more involved, are able to memorise the interview better, thus increasing their knowledge and familiarity with the interviews.

Transcribing interviews is an exercise in interpretation, because every researcher makes a choice about what to transcribe and how to represent the transcription in text (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Bourdieu further argues: 'even the most literal form of writing up (the simplest punctuation, the placing of the comma, for example, can dictate the whole sense of a phrase) represents a translation or even an interpretation' (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 30). As a researcher, I also sought to reconcile the need to be as faithful as possible to the original recordings while also providing a readable and comprehensive passage for analysis. Bearing these considerations in mind, I

followed Wellard and McKenna's (2014) advice to deploy word for word transcription and to use wide margins to note non-verbal cues and social settings. However, I have chosen to omit from my transcription conversation fillers (such as 'uhms') because I found that it often distracts from the readability of my content. Similar advice was given by MacLean, Meyer and Estable (2004), who found that omitting some 'uhms' improved the text's readability and did not affect its accuracy. Following Wellard and McKenna's (2014) advice, I re-listened to the tapes multiple times to ensure the accuracy of the transcript and to discern themes which I may have missed the first time. Transcription and translation have given me multiple opportunities to re-listen to the same audio many times; I was therefore very familiar with the story of each interviewee.

The second stage of my data interpretation was to translate it into English. Although the primary analysis and interpretation was done on the data in Vietnamese, I have also chosen to translate whole interviews into English, not only those passages which I used for my thesis. Doing so once again helped me engage at a deeper level with my data. When translating, I have been careful to use equivalent English expressions to the source Vietnamese words (as recommended by Halai, 2007); whenever there were words which are difficult to translate, I have used literal translations along with an explanation of what these expressions mean (this will be particularly prominent when I explain, for example, the complicated network of Vietnamese pronouns and how they imply certain power relations). As a Vietnamese researcher fluent in both English and Vietnamese, I used this cultural and historical knowledge to aid my understanding and interpretation of the data that I received. To ensure the accuracy of my translations, I referred back to works of Vietnamese and Western historians who have written about Vietnamese military conflicts in English (e.g., Jamieson, 1995; Pham, 1999), and paid particular attention to their explanations of certain cultural phenomena and untranslatable expressions. Where appropriate, I have referred to them throughout my thesis. Doing so has helped me to ensure that my translations and explanations of my interviewees cultural context are as accurate as possible.

The third step to my data analysis was the interpretation of emergent themes. Given that in qualitative research, data collection and data analysis are often merged (Gibbs, 2007), I have continuously reviewed the literature on the Vietnamese military conflicts to gain a more effective reading of my interviewees' responses (e.g., Jamieson, 1995; Nguyen, 1983; Pham, 1999). I have repeatedly reviewed the literature and my transcripts to make sense of the analysis and to detect any previously missed themes. As advised by Wellard and McKenna (2014), I continued to reread my transcripts and listened to audios until no new themes were detected. The data was further

analysed in light of my interviewees' background and social context to gain a better understanding of the responses given to me. I identified similarities and differences on the themes across all interviews. While doing so, I also ensured that my data was consistent and as accurate as possible; while, as I elaborated above, uncovering objective 'hard' truth was not the aim of this research, I still needed to mitigate potential inaccuracies, misrepresentations, and biases. Therefore, the trends in my data were further cross-checked for accuracy in the wider literature on the Vietnamese military conflicts; most were consistent and in line with the records of wider social context and the impact of communism and Confucianism. Where differences and contradictions were identified they were analysed further to establish reasons as to why they occurred. For example, one interviewee noted that he was conscripted while another said that there was no conscription. This contradiction was explained by the different years in which they were recruited, which in turn reflected the course of the Vietnam War and the need of the Viet Cong for new recruits (confirmed by wider literature on the conflict such as Donnell, 1967 and Rottman, 2007). In line with Power's recommendations, I have also closely traced the lives of my interviewees and imagined myself in their place to gain deeper insight into their logic of practice.

The fourth step of my data analysis was to integrate the emergent themes into a comprehensive text and explain the context behind my findings. Writing about interviews, as Graue (as cited in Trainor, 2012, p. 134) states, is 'an interpretive process that can only partially represent complex social worlds'. Janesick (2012) therefore encourages the researcher to ensure that together with direct quotations, there are relevant explanations of the contexts, language, slang, and stereotypes; for example when explaining the life history of Cleopatra, the gender issues and the importance of a powerful female leader were all explained in context. Bourdieu (1996) himself cautioned against abstracting practices from their contexts. This caution has also been issued by feminist scholars such as McRobbie (2002, p. 131), who insists that 'without the wider web of social relations in which they are embedded, these testimonies exist merely as the stated truths of personal experience'. I therefore took particular care to represent the emerging themes within wider cultural and historical contexts, in order to provide a consistent account.

In sum, I have tried to mitigate potential biases and misrepresentations, as well as provide 'thick descriptions' of my data to provide a coherent and nuanced narrative. This was done both through immersing myself in my data and tracing the logic of practice by my interviewees, as well as continuously reviewing other sources which described the Vietnamese cultural and historical context.

3.8. Conclusion

My research process was influenced not only by current debates and concerns about children and their agency, but also my Bourdieusian framework. Together, they result in a methodology and method which prioritise the voices of former child soldiers, tracing their personal histories and everyday experiences, to understand how the social conditions in which individuals are embedded shape their decisions and experience. To provide a holistic, in-depth analysis of the decisions and experience of children in political struggles, I have collected qualitative data using life history interviews.

While my methodology allows me to access rich and detailed responses, there are, however, many potential challenges when collecting qualitative data and specifically retrospective interviews. I therefore also reflected on issues of my own positionality and memory, as well as how I dealt with transcribing, translating, and interpreting my data. In doing so, I was guided by a Bourdieusian framework, which emphasised the importance of tracing the internal logic of practice, as opposed to objective truth. While acknowledging my position as a non-neutral researcher, I still aimed to mitigate biases and misrepresentations using tools and methods proposed by other Bourdieusian scholars. Doing so allowed me to balance analysis of rich and detailed data while making sure that the accounts I present are accurate and consistent.

Chapter 4: Historical and social context of Vietnam in 1955–1975

4.1. Introduction

The Bourdieusian relational approach, which presumes that actions of different actors arise as a result of structure-agent interaction, necesitates an elaboration of the context in which Vietnamese child soldiering took place. Understanding the children's environment and the ways in which it shaped them will be particularly helpful when investigating how the Vietnamese 20th-century childhood model produced practices that were continuous with child soldiering. Outlining the history that has led to a particular model of childhood helps to contextualise the concepts of habitus and field that were outlined in the previous chapter. It shows how various traditions and social norms have been disseminated, changed, and reinforced throughout the long Vietnamese history, and become the 'structures', within which children's decision to join the wars were made. In turn, it demonstrates that the practice of child soldiering was an outcome of specific historical conditions.

To this end, this chapter maps out the evolution of some characteristics of the Vietnamese society, within which child soldiering took place. Throughout its history, Vietnam was influenced by China more than India and was continually recognised as a society which exhibits characteristics typical of Confucian Heritage Cultures (Yum, 1994). I will therefore start with a general description of the key doctrines of Confucianism. Afterwards, I will explain how Confucianism was disseminated in Vietnam and how it changed through its interaction with history and customs, which in turn led to formation of the 'Vietnamese' version of Confucianism, different from that of China, Korea or Japan. Besides examining these societal factors, I also focus on explaining the role of village and family in the Vietnamese society.

The chapter demonstrates how various societal norms and Confucian values such as a strong sense of duty, collectivism, and filial piety, were affected by war and presence of the guerillas. In particular, I will show how the Viet Cong attempted to use Confucian principles to carry out total mobilisation and encouraged civilians to join the political struggle. The last section contextualises further how the social engineering by the guerrilla group has affected the notion of what it means to be a good child, and how it incorporated participating in the political struggle as an inseparable part of childhood.

While my main focus of investigation are Viet Cong guerrillas, and the social context within which they operated, this social context was shaped by Vietnamese history and its encounters with Chinese and French colonisations. Therefore, along with how Vietnamese society was changed under the influence of war with the US, there are also references and descriptions of how the presence of China and France impacted Vietnam. Further, the section on how guerrillas conducted social engineering is divided into two sections: one on the Viet Minh and one on the Viet Cong. This is because to understand Viet Cong, one needs to understand its predecessor – the Viet Minh, which was a guerrilla group leading the rebellion against the French. More details on the two groups is provided in the respective sections.

4.2. Confucianism: key values and social implications

Before explaining the specificities of Vietnamese Confucianism, I will firstly briefly describe Confucianism as it was conceived in China and its key tenets, which are common to all Confucian societies. Confucianism is a secular social doctrine, originating in China, first and foremost concerned with achieving a harmonious society (King & Bond, 1985). It is, unlike Buddhism and Taoism, not a religion concerned with spirituality, karma, or death (Cheng, 1990). Rather, its teachings are utilitarian, covering politics, ethics, and society. It is thus often described as 'extremely rationalistic' and 'bereft of any form of metaphysics' (Weber, as cited in Nakamura, 1964, p. 16). Confucianism's relatively indifferent attitude towards death and prioritisation of more practical problems is particularly reflected in the following passage:

> When a student named Tzu-lu asked Confucius about serving ghosts and spirits, Confucius said, "If one cannot yet serve men, how can he serve the spirits?" Asked about death, Confucius replied, "If you do not understand life, how can you understand death?" (Yum, 1988, p. 377).

Arguably, it is this pragmatism that made Confucianism the strongest force in shaping East Asian cultures, unsurpassed by Buddhism and Taoism (Yum, 1988). While the wide dissemination of Confucianism contributed to changes and varied interpretations of the key tenets, some common principles are often cited when describing its teachings and their manifestations in Confucian societies.

4.2.1 Key values

Among the many Confucian virtues, several are stressed as key societal pillars. The first is benevolence (Chinese – '*ren*'), which is characterised as love, empathy and compassion for humankind (Shek, Yu, & Fu, 2013). The second is ritual propriety ('*li*'), which guides social relations, i.e., paying appropriate respect to others and observing social etiquette. Ritual, Confucius believed, helped to build a sense of community and 'beautify' human relations (Higgins, 2013, p. 33). The third key virtue is '*yi*' – often translated as either righteousness or 'duty' (Lu, 2018). It refers to understanding one's social role and fulfillment of prescribed obligations and responsibilities towards their family and community: 'following a duty, a rule, what one ought to do, or what is right to do' (Lu, 2018, p. 13). Of particular importance are role-based duties, i.e., from a son to his parents, a servant to his king. Another key virtue often cited is '*zhong*', which can be interpreted in several ways. The first common translation is 'loyalty', which does not, however, indicate blind submission – rather, it implies consistently following one's duties, always doing one's best. As such, it has also been translated as 'dutifulness', specifically toward one's superiors or equals (Higgins, 2013; Foust, 2012). In this sense, '*zhong*' is both loyalty and absolute dedication, both to oneself and to others (Lippiello, 2016). For Chinese Confucians, loyalty first started at home – hence another key Confucian virtue, filial piety ('*xiao*'). However, in the Chinese imperial period, '*zhong*' also referred to loyalty to the ruler – which, in turn, was an extension of family loyalty (Sung, 2018)

4.2.2 Social manifestations

In terms of society and relations, several features are common in Confucian societies. Firstly, the individual does not exist alone and thus, by definition, cannot be detached from their relationships (Yao, 2000). All actions are seen as a form of interaction between man and man (King & Bond, 1985). As a result of this perception, Confucianism has an elaborate code of conduct in different social relations with clear guidance on rules and duties in each case. Social harmony in general, and the individual's self-cultivation in particular, is achieved through interactions with other individuals and by fulfilling one's prescribed duties within them, e.g., filial piety (in father-child relationships), brotherliness (in brother-brother relationships) or loyalty (servant-ruler). As such, Confucian culture stresses duty-based morality (as opposed to rights-based morality) and tends to encourage its followers to be more group and family-oriented, socially dependent beings. Maintenance of social order is essential: 'let the ruler be ruler, the father be father, the son be

son' (Cheng, 1990, p. 513). Multiple loyalties (to family, community, and state) are not in conflict but rather complementary to one another; these relations are what shape the individual.

Secondly, the collective community holds an important place in Confucian cultures. Self-sacrifice for the benefit of a social group is encouraged (Zhao & Roper, 2011). In times of difficulty, collective interests are above individual rights. Any behaviour that violated social norms or moral standards would result in losing face (Hwang, 2011). One's successes and failures are not one's own but experienced by those around them – the closer the relationship, the more intense the feeling (Hwang & Han, 2012). These codes maintained social order powerfully – to the extent that Confucian societies were also known as 'no law societies', i.e., collective scrutiny underpinned with Confucian values acted as a disciplinary force, thus decreasing the importance of legal institutions (Pham, 2005).

Thirdly, relations with family were primary. In the Confucian understanding of the origin of human lives, there is no conception of a common creator as with Christianity; rather, it is recognised that each individual's life is a continuation of their parents (Han, 2016). Thus, the principle of filial piety was non-optional, since children were indebted to their parents for creating and rearing them. From a young age, children were taught to listen, serve and not challenge or talk back to their parents. Being a member of a family, one was also expected to do what was needed to better family life. As such, family relations were defined by a sharpened sense of responsibility towards all members and a collective family consciousness (Hwang & Han, 2012). Filial piety was seen as the greatest virtue, as illustrated in the following passage:

> The Governor of She in conversation with Confucius said, "In our village there is some-one called 'True Person'. When his father took a sheep on the sly, he reported him to the authorities." Confucius replied, "Those who are true in my village conduct themselves differently. A father covers for his son, and a son covers for his father. And being true lies in this." (Ni, 2015)

Notably, this principle was also translated into other organisations, such as work teams or voluntary organisations. These became 'families' and thus the relationships within them were defined by interdependence and loyalty. As Madsen (2012) observes: in the West, family often becomes a voluntary association, with members being able to stop affiliation if they so desired. For Confucian societies, the opposite is true: voluntary societies are often 'bound by loyalties that make exit difficult' (Madsen, 2012, p. 202). This, in turn, has implications for a person's individual

freedom and agency: in a Confucian society, freedom means not the ability to join and leave as desired, but to creatively use and negotiate the commitments assigned by fate, striving to deeply understand the meaning of one's roles and obligations and shape the relationships to the best of their ability (Madsen, 2012).

4.3. Dissemination of Confucianism in Vietnam

In ancient Vietnam, Confucianism firstly spread through contact with the Han culture, which lasted from circa 111 BC for the next 2,000 years (Pham, 2015). In the first instance, it was a part of the assimilation strategy instituted by the Chinese ruling and feudal system, because Confucian core ideas about maintaining social order and respect for authority was useful for cultivating obedient subjects and thus beneficial to nation-building (Nguyen, 1998). It was institutionalised through the system of choosing government officials, who had to pass the Confucian national examination system to be able to work. It was also propagated through the educational system to reach all people, from the elites to students (Pham, 2015). Chinese rulers such as Huang Fu also called for proper behaviour from officials who were appointed to spread Confucian teachings among the Vietnamese, urging them to lead by example (Whitmore, 1077).

It is important to note that Confucianism was not the only religion spread in Vietnam. Buddhism and Taoism were also introduced during the Chinese domination. However, the centrality of Confucianism persisted in social and moral codes, whereas Buddhism and Taoism primarily affected the spiritual realms. The religions co-existed in parallel with each other: many Buddhist and Taoist monks, 'being open-minded and learned men', taught Confucianist philosophy to those who wanted to become civil servants alongside practicing their own religion, (Nguyen, 1998). While the first generation of Vietnamese Confucianists were Buddhist monks, the second generation could spread Confucianism independently without the help of Buddhists, thus keeping the practices alive in villages. Confucian dissemination was further aided by the fact that Vietnamese rulers, even if they were Buddhist, would extend Confucian influence and conduct themselves according to the Confucian code (Nguyen, 1998). As a result of persistent dissemination policies, Confucianism slowly 'pushed aside' Buddhism and Taoism and infiltrated all levels of Vietnamese society, including the ruling class, government officials, scholars and villagers (McHale, 2004, p. 87). By the 10th century, Confucianism was well-rooted in Vietnam as the dominant social guiding force (Nguyen, 2016).

However, the Vietnamese did not see Confucianism merely as a religion of their colonisers. It continued to be the dominant doctrine regardless of whether Chinese or Vietnamese rulers were in power. Some of the leaders of rebellions against the Chinese were Confucianist: for example, Nguyen Trai, after gaining victory against the Ming dynasty, began the proclamation of independence (Bình Ngô Đại Cáo) with a reference to Confucian philosophical principles of benevolence (*nhân*, Vietnamese translation of Chinese *ren*) and righteousness (*nghĩa*, translation of Chinese *yi*). In the 15th century, the Vietnamese Le dynasty made Confucianism the official state religion. It then published a deeply Confucian code of morality and law and published books to distribute in villages. The dynasty enjoyed a lot of prestige and a long reign, thus successfully modelling Vietnamese society according to the Confucianist rules (Nguyen, 1998). Further, Vietnamese people did not blindly copy Confucian concepts. The Confucian texts were mostly consulted by the Vietnamese rulers because they had already proven to work in China; however, the Vietnamese officials tended to ignore the Chinese historical framework that preceded the texts (Kelley, 2006). As a result, they were interpreted with a much more practical intent. This is to be contrasted with, for example, Korea, which took Confucianism as a whole and 'Koreanised it'; by comparison, Vietnamese rulers only extracted the select tenets that would aid the problems of Vietnamese people (Hoang & Hoang, 2020).

Until the early 20th century, organisation of society as a whole was based on Confucian values. On the one hand, it still did not concern itself with questions of spirituality and metaphysics; authors such as Voltaire (as cited in Tonnesson, 1993) thus claim that Vietnam has been effectively securalised. On the other hand, Woodside (1984) argues that Confucianism was a religion in the sense that its code was presented as the ultimate truth. The rules of social behaviour were considered the rules of the universe. Within both interpretations, historical evidence suggests that Confucian scholars were regarded with respect and often acted as advisors on both the governmental and the village level. This was particularly prominent during the Nguyen dynasty (1802–1945), when Confucianism reached the height of its influence. In the words of a Vietnamese historian Dao Duy Anh:

> For more than two thousand years… in Vietnamese society, one breathed a Confucian atmosphere, fed on the milk of Confucianism, ate Confucianism, and even died with Confucian rites… [N]othing escaped the control of Confucian philosophy and ritual teaching (cited in McHale, 2002, p. 422).

As the French influence increased, Confucianism stopped being an official state religion. However, regardless of the collapse of Confucian institutions and disappearance of teachers, Vietnamese society retained the Confucian morality and approach to social conduct (Dam, 1999). The next sections examine how Confucianism manifested itself in Vietnamese society on several levels: society, village, and family.

4.4. Manifestations of Confucianism in Vietnamese society

4.4.1 Prominent societal values

This section will analyse how Confucianist values affected Vietnamese society as a whole. As Confucianism was disseminated, it inevitably interacted and co-existed with pre-Confucian Vietnamese social customs. Some of the indigenous traditions, such as matriarchal families, were completely replaced by Confucian patriarchal orders (Nguyen, 1988). Others were echoed and made stronger by already existent practices – for example, the Vietnamese culture of wet-rice cultivation had lready encouraged a tradition of hard work and tight social bonds in villages and communities (Pham, 2015). Tran (2003) further points out that Confucianism, with its emphasis on practicality, fitted and blended well with the indigenous Vietnamese upfront and pragmatic approach to dealing with problems. Many Confucian doctrines were 'Vietnamised', i.e., adapted and appropriated on the basis of Vietnamese history and interpretations of the current ruling dynasty. Below is a description of the prominent characteristics of Vietnamese society, most of which were derived from Confucianism, and how they have changed historically since the Vietnamese encounter with France and the US.

Collectivism: Vietnamese society is often characterised as a collectivist society, whereby an individual is perceived not as a free-floating molecule, but as deeply constrained by social bonds (Schafer, 2006). Upon birth, everyone is a member of not only family, but a village and a country. Collectivism was already present in Vietnam prior to Confucianism due to the country's dependence on agriculture, as common efforts to cultivate crops were necessary (Pham, 2015). Confucianism, with its emphasis on relationships, has strengthened it further. This has implications for people's perceptions of proper conduct: group preference is often prioritised over individual members' beliefs. External opinions, shame, and social pressures are powerful factors which regulate people's behaviour (Phan, 2017). The importance of these bonds is reflected in

the Vietnamese language: relational terms are used as personal pronouns, and every first-person pronoun changes depending on one's relationship with their addresee. The equivalent of the English 'I' (a neutral first-person pronoun which does not reflect the social relations of the speakers), and even the word 'individual' are a relatively recent phenomenon in Vietnamese language, appearing in the early decades of the 20th century (Marr, 2000).

With French colonisation, Vietnamese collectivism did experience some swings towards individualism (Marr, 2000). This was particularly prominent among the Western-educated elite. Some Vietnamese intellectuals attempted to articulate the novel concept of individual conscience – 'a court of law that sits in your own heart'; one that did not concern itself with reputation and 'face', but with an internal sense of right and wrong (Jamieson, 1995). However, these ideas of individualism never went beyond an urban minority (Marr, 2000). Within the Western-educated circles themselves, there were observations that in Vietnamese society, French influence notwithstanding, the individual was nothing (Marr, 2000). Collectivism was even further strengthened in the wake of the Indochina and Vietnam wars. The collective action brought acceptance of socialism and opposing notions of individualism were criticised for threatening group solidarity (Schafer, 2000).

Loss of face: Borton and Ryder (2000, p. 24) noted that 'loss of face is painful in any society, but unbearable in Vietnam'. The Vietnamese notion of 'face' or 'honour' is closely connected to collectivism. It is not seen as an individual matter, but that of the whole family (sometimes of the whole village) and future generations. This is illustrated by a common saying: 'After death, a tiger leaves behind its skin, a person leaves behind one's name and reputation' (Rydstrom, 2006, p. 333). The community and family (including future generations and ancestors) experience honour achieved by one individual; but they also take blame or experience shame in response to an individual's misconducts or failures (Pham, 1999). As such, it contrasts with the responses experienced in the West: 'in Vietnam, one's transgressions have both a horizontal and a vertical dimension', i.e., affecting both those around them and the generations to come (Slote, 1998, p. 325). However, Slote (1998) also observes that it is an important factor which holds society together.

Righteousness/Duty: Arguably, this Confucian virtue is the most pronounced in Vietnam. Doan (2009) observed that while all Confucian Heritage societies strongly exhibit the key virtues, if only one 'keyword' was chosen to describe each, China would be characterised by filial piety; South Korea by ritual propriety, Japan by loyalty, and Vietnam by righteousness. As mentioned before,

righteousness (Chinese – *yi*; Vietnamese – *nghĩa*) refers to fulfillment of one's obligations, and thus is sometimes translated as 'duty' in English. Indeed, a strong sense of duty – 'often laced with no small amount of guilt' – is a prominent feature of Vietnamese society (Jamieson, 1995, p. 19). Vietnamese Confucian scholars often referred to the importance of the fulfilment of duties and obligations for individual self-cultivation. In the traditional Confucian interpretation, *yi* referred to fulfillment of obligations in set relationships (son to father, servant to king, etc.). In Vietnamese interpretation, this notion extended to include a duty towards people who are being wronged in general (Doan, 2009). The Vietnamese idea of righteousness was somewhat diluted by the French rule and the new norms they attempted to introduce – for example, the French-influenced education manual *Ethics in education* explained the novel idea of 'duty to oneself', rather than to other people (Jamieson, 1995). The extent to which this replaced the old notions of duty is unclear, however. In recent writings about Confucianism, the idea of duty towards other people is still strongly articulated by Vietnamese scholars:

> Many researchers often criticise Confucianism, stating that this doctrine only emphasises carrying out personal duties and responsibilities in their relationships, and not addressing the desire for personal happiness. This perspective is not entirely correct, because everyone feels happy when fulfilling their obligations and duties towards family and society. In fulfilling their responsibilities towards other people, every person will be able to find their own happiness. (Hoang, 2017; my translation)

Loyalty (trung): Vietnamese Confucianism, like the Chinese version, prioritised loyalty to one's ingroup and family. However, the Chinese notion of loyalty primarily consisted of loyalty to the ruling dynasty, master, or to the monarch (Vo (2016) observes a similar interpretation of Confucianist loyalty in Japanese samurai code). In Vietnam, this notion was considered too narrow. Le Quy Don, a Vietnamese poet and government official, for example, argued that loyalty should also manifest in devotion to the country and its people, rather than to a particular monarch (as cited in Hoang & Hoang, 2020). This broadening of the concept is often linked to frequent Vietnamese rebellions against invaders. Given the political instability, with almost 100 independence-related revolts and numerous changes in political leadership, it was difficult to practice loyalty to one dynasty – once lost, Vietnamese feudal dynasties would cease to exist (Hoang & Hoang, 2020). As such, the traditional Confucian notion of loyalty was expanded to include the benefits of the country and the people.

4.4.2 Confucianism in Vietnamese villages

As Confucianism postulates, an individual's relationship with their community is essential – individual desires and wellbeing are often ignored in favour of the community's. In the case of my interviewees, who were peasant children in the mid-20th century, the community was the village where they grew up. The civilians' loyalty to their villages was further effectively utilised by the Viet Cong – as the next sections show, being a largely rural movement, they made the village one of the central sites for the political struggle. As such, elaborating the cultural role of Vietnamese villages, and peasants' relationships to it, is particularly important.

Multiple Vietnamese authors have stressed that in Vietnam, villages, rather than cities, are the main unit of society. For example, Phan (2015) and Mai (2009) go as far as to say that Vietnamese cities and towns, including Hanoi, were extensions of villages; without villages, there would be no (Vietnamese) nation. The village is an important point of allegiance for its inhabitants, coming only after family (Pham, 1999; Phan, 2006). The Vietnamese word for 'village' (làng) itself is commonly translated as 'village community'. Mai (2009) further asserted that every Vietnamese person, no matter where they were in the world, were a 'village person' (người làng). The tight links between individuals, families and villages manifested in several cultural phenomena. For example, 'Where is your home-village?' is one of the first and most common small talk questions in Vietnam. Village is the start and the end of one's life – as Phan (2015) states, Vietnamese people do not dream of going to heaven, but rather of being buried in their home village. This is a divergence from the Chinese tradition – the Chinese built their social organisation around extended family clans; the Vietnamese did so with villages (Brigham, 2011; Khuat, 2009). Further, unlike loosely structured villages in Cambodia, Laos, and especially Thailand, where the members of different kin did not have rigid responsibilities towards each other, the Vietnamese village is a tight cohesive community with a longer tradition than anywhere else in Southeast Asia (Phan, 2006; Kleinen, 1999). During peaceful times villages gained so much autonomy and cohesion that 'the king's word is weaker than law of the village' (Phan, 2006).

Phan (2015) also states that unlike villages in Thailand and some other Southeast Asian countries, the social structures of Vietnamese villages were an outcome of the natural environment, rather than a creation of colonialist or nationalist policies. The harsh monsoon climate with rain, heat, and humidity contributed to irrigation-based agriculture and the establishment of close-knit, almost autonomous, villages. If a family wanted to manage their rice fields, they had to manage water intake. This meant that the water had to flow through their fellow

villagers' rice fields, sometimes damaging them. Thus, unity and collectivisation of the villagers were formed, and the village life encouraged mutual solidarity and assistance. As such, this collectivity was established out of necessity to ensure safety and stability in everyday peasant life. Every family had to constantly work hard to maintain its relationship with the neighbourhood, the lane, the rest of the village. Their structure and importance is deeply embedded in the Vietnamese village life (Phan, 2015).

The strong village tradition, then, is strongly influenced by the indigenous Vietnamese culture. However, the everyday life and code of conduct in villages, at the time, was deeply influenced by Confucianism. The villagers did not always receive formal Confucianist education, although many schools were set up for this purpose. Nevertheless, Confucianist scholars were generally well-respected and often acted as influential advisors who provided guidance on different occasions (Nguyen, 1998). For a Vietnamese historian, Dao Duy Anh (as cited in McHale, 2004), the villagers were more Confucianist than scholars, as reflected in the following statement: 'It is said that we venerate Confucianism, but one has to enter the peasantry to see clearly what the feeling of filial piety and loyalty truly is'. Indeed, the notions of loyalty and collectivism outlined above were strongly reflected in the village life. An individual never stopped being a member of a certain community – kin, neighbourhood, association of village. According to Phan (2006), for example:

> Due to the multiple relations that merge into each other, the collective spirit of villages is very tight and strong. In the village, the place of the individual is very small (Phan, 2006, p. 20).

Some Vietnamese sayings reflect this collective spirit: 'Once it floods, the whole village will drown' (warning the villagers not to be nonchalant towards environmental dangers because they will affect everyone), or 'collective foolishness is better than being a smartass' (Phan, 2006). Similar to how families assume pride or shame in an individual's successes or shortcomings, one's success or failures would reflect on the whole village-community. As a result, there are many obligations and constraints that people had to carry out due to their tight connections to their village. This is strongly articulated in Phan's words (2015): 'Even if unhappy with it [obligations towards a village], there was no way to escape it – if one didn't like these obligations, they would have to accept it as something natural, not too different from accepting rain and sunshine'.

The importance of loyalty and collectivity was also reflected in many villages' regulations and rules. For example, in day to day life, two types of labour coexisted parallel to each other: individual family and collective village. Besides individual paid work to provide for oneself (the main type of work), there was also collective unpaid work, e.g., repairing, maintaining temples, wells, etc. Failure to comply would mean that the individual would face judgement and criticism from other villagers. The loyalty towards the village was specifically spelled out in a series of legal documents and village regulations. Examples of those regulations include: 'People from the same village, when travelling far […] should help each other […] if they selfishly leave their friend, they need to be punished'; or 'people in the same neighbourhood should care and help for each other…' (Phan, 2006).

By the time the Indochina war broke out, the village consciousness, founded on collectivity and strong Confucian principles, was deeply entrenched in everyday life. It was even further strengthened during French colonisation. As colonial policies drove many people into poverty, families had to look for ways to survive, which included relying on institutions outside of their family – neighbours and villagers (Jamieson, 1995). As such, the changes through colonisation and economy have only made the village and kin relations closer, not looser.

4.4.3 Confucianism and Vietnamese families

Lastly, I will examine how Confucianism manifested in families. Many Vietnamese concepts of obligations and social duties are first and foremost directed towards family. The principles of family structure and the centrality of filial piety were incorporated from Confucian principles; however, they also retained some of the flexibility characteristic of Southeast Asian societies (Hirschman & Vu, 1996). Consequently, the concept of the Vietnamese family does not fit neatly within either the East Asian or Southeast Asian social or cultural frameworks. For example, Phan (2015) observes that while Vietnamese families are patriarchal (Confucian influence), with the father being associated with authority and discipline, a Vietnamese father is not like a Chinese father, who is like a king. Similarly, Vietnamese families preferred boys, which echoes patriarchal Confucian family values. However, daughters were not completely isolated from society and restricted to their house like in ancient Chinese societies, but shared many legal rights with sons, e.g., the right to inheritance (Yu, 1994). Therefore, the Vietnamese family was a mix of Confucian and pre-Confucian values; a model characterised as 'semi-nuclear' by Hirschman and Loi (1996). It exhibited the strong impact of the nuclear family (like that of Confucian families) but at the same

time relied more strongly on kinship networks for social and emotional support, echoing the structure of Southest Asian families. This was particularly evident in the rural areas.

A common thread in both these value systems was the centrality of family networks in people's lives. The communitarian character of the family was also strong before the law: for example, if one member of the family broke the law, all others (for example, their parents) had to be punished. If a child misbehaved, it reflected badly on their parents. This principle persisted despite the French attempts to introduce individual responsibility in some areas (Phan, 2006; Pham, 1999). Pham (1999, p. 18) traces such unity and allegiance to family to the harsh environmental conditions and climate and goes as far as to say that in Vietnam, there is 'no individual in the Western sense, and certainly no free individual', precisely because they are never completely free from their family and community. Pham (1999, p. 18) writes:

> ...While the raison d'être of the Western family may be to produce and support the individual, whose maturity will signal the attainment of its objective, in the Vietnamese family the raison d'être of each individual member [is] to continue, maintain, and serve the family.

While it is true that anyone who behaved selfishly would be seen unfavourably in society, this was even more true of those who treated their relatives badly. As with other Confucian societies, filial piety was an important core virtue in the mid-20th century Vietnam. This was articulated by multiple folk sayings (for example, 'A high mountain is not higher than parents' merit and goodness'), and proves to be present in modern Vietnamese philosophy, as articularted by scholars: 'Filial piety is one of the basic virtues; a standard and rule for a person's personality' (Hoang, 2014, p. 70; my translation). A child was expected to respect and obey their parents when they were young, and take care of their parents when grown up. They should also make sure that their parents are buried and worshipped according to proper rituals, i.e., filial piety continues beyond the parents' death (Ngo & Hoang, 2018).

Besides the social judgement an individual might face if they do not display filial piety, these acts might also be punishable by law. For example, in the Le dynasty law code, of 10 'great crimes', 2 were specifically related to family. One was more general 'killing or murdering parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts, in-laws', but another related to displaying specific unfilial behaviours: 'denouncing/accusing, cursing parents and grandparents, disobeying teachings of parents', lying about parents' death, marrying someone or 'having fun'/dressing inappropriately

during parents' funeral, failing to organise a funeral for parents (as cited in Binh Phuoc, 2018; my translation). Disobeying parents could be punishable by military service, while insulting parents could be punishable by beating, wearing chains, or being sent to be a labourer in other provinces (Phan, 2008). Later, Gia Long law code issued by the Nguyen dynasty, similarly echoed that 'of all evils, no evil is greater than being unfilial' (Le, 2013). It is clear, then, that loyalty, filial piety, and subordination to one's family, particularly to one's parents, was encouraged at all levels of Vietnamese society and became a core virtue.

With French and American invasions, the role of family remained important: as Phan (2006) observes, throughout the history of Vietnam the family and kin relations underwent almost no changes. There could be ups and downs, sometimes they could be looser and sometimes tighter depending on the historical situation, but generally they have been stable. Kin and family were the source of harmony and energy for other societal relations. The political, economic, and societal structures could change but family life was preserved (Phan, 2006).

We can see, then, that Confucianism has impacted strongly on the Vietnamese society, village, and family – all of which are important units of analysis in my subsequent empirical research. However, the context in which child soldiering took place was a Confucian society during a war, with both sides attempting to shift the social norms in order to encourage recruitment and mobilisation. Because my research is focused on recruits who participated for the Viet Cong, I will next analyse how these guerrilla groups used and shifted Confucian values to serve their goals.

4.5. Guerrillas' engagement with core values of Vietnamese society

Rebel groups reproduce and rely on common cultural and political values already present in society, even if their goal is to overthrow the dominant social order. In doing so, they create and align the group's legitimacy with the population's expectations (Podder, 2017). The Viet Cong was not an exception. Before explaining how the guerrilla groups engaged with Vietnamese society, I will briefly explain their ideological foundation and how it affected their tactics of conducting the revolutions. The organisation of the Viet Cong is too complex and quite often was too irregular to cover in detail within this chapter; as a result, I will not be able to cover all the nuances in the guerrilla groups' operation. Rather, the aim of this section is to outline their main ideological

features in order to better understand how they inspired the process of social engineering and engaged with Vietnamese sociocultural practices.

In the first instance, the Viet Cong (like its predecessor, the Viet Minh) presented itself as national liberation group, fighting against the US. As a result, much of its rhetoric was infused with statements about the unity of the people, patriotism, and expelling 'foreign invaders' (Nguyen, 1972; Jamieson, 1995). Within the propaganda materials, the language of people's unity, of 'us' (chúng ta) is consistent (Srichampa, 2007). The role of patriotism in the guerrilla groups' ideology cannot be ignored; in words of Weiner (1967, p. 505; emphasis added): 'Logic dictates that if we are fighting only a military enemy, the war would have been over long ago. But something, some tenacious force – namely, Vietnamese communism allied with not a little Vietnamese nationalism – is tying down an estimated 400,000 American troops…' Similarly, Donnell (1967) reported that the Viet Cong successfully capitalised on patriotism by drawing on the long Vietnamese history of expelling the foreigners. It is the 'undoubted authenticity of the patriotic appeals', that Rolph (1966, p. 5) believes 'attracted the loyalties of a large percentage of the population'.

In the second instance, the guerrilla group drew on Marxist principles to shape their ideological foundation. This 'Marxian message' from Vietnamese journals, for example, has been summarised by Hyunh (1976, p. 461):

> You are poor and you are exploited, and you are going to be poor and to be exploited because of the existing economic and political conditions; because of the French, the notables and the landlords […] Those who rule over you and keep you poor and miserable will be overthrown. By the revolution you can eliminate once and for all the exploitation of man by man; you can enter into a socialist society, in which you can be your own master.

The language of labour equality, joining together against exploitation, and building a socialist future was a consistent feature in the propaganda of the Vietnamese groups, most notably the Viet Cong (Nguyen, 2017; Lacouture & Coneen, 1965; Donnell, Pauker & Zasloff, 1965). They referred to their own mission as fight to end poverty, redistribution of land, and ending unemployment; all of these messages can be summed up 'under the rubric social justice' (Donnell, Pauker & Zasloff, 1965, p. 28). As Huynh further continues, for the Vietnamese peasants who were used to poverty and hunger, 'communism' (cộng sản) meant simply common property, sharing and 'dividing them [properties] equally among everyone'. It is these appeals which made the communist groups attractive. One of the former Viet Cong members remembered, for

example, that he joined the group precisely because they advocated against exploitation and for bettering welfare of the people (Zasloff, 1968).

Thirdly, the Viet Cong derived particular inspiration from Maoist principles of mass mobilisation 'people's war' (Conley, 1968). Echoing Mao's statements that 'peasants to guerrillas are like water to fish', Ho Chi Minh (as cited in Mach, 2019, n.p) declared: 'The people possess great strength. Mass mobilisation is very important. Poor mass mobilisation leads to poor performance in everything. Good mass mobilisation leads to success in everything'. Popular support was essential to the Vietnamese guerrillas: they relied on civillians for food, shelter, and potential recruits. Peasants who didn't participate in the military service, were used for labour, assistance of the guerrillas at the rear, and production. To achieve this popular support, the guerrillas needed to be in tune with the expectations of their local communities. As such, the guerrillas sought to articulate their values and ideology to be attractive and comprehensive in the eyes of the population and worthy of their support. The Viet Cong were notable for its sensitivity to Vietnamese traditions, particularly those of the villages, and their ability to build on the values and traditions of the already existent social order to mobilise the masses (Lanning & Cragg, 1992; Halberstam, 2007). In addition, they worked hard to establish friendly and intimate relations with the communities within which they were embedded, which is another prominent feature of many Maoist-inspired groups (Shah, 2013).

Having established some main features of the Vietnamese guerrilla group's ideology – emphasis on patriotism, social justice, and reliance on the masses – I will now elaborate how they were infused with the existing social and cultural Confucian practices.

4.5.1. Viet Minh

By the end of the 19th century, the French attempted, with little success, to change the common societal values. The Vietnamese rural sector continued to maintain the common perceptions about social relationships and community (Lanning & Cragg, 2007). The norms were more actively transformed and reinforced during the presence of the guerilla groups, in line with Hoffman's observation that 'rebel rule is always embedded in historically contingent values, norms, beliefs and forms of governance' (2015, p. 158).

As I have noted before, Viet Minh was the predecessor of the Viet Cong. Indeed, the majority of the Viet Cong leadership and members, including Ho Chi Minh, had earlier been part of the Viet Minh (noted by Zasloff, 1968). I will therefore dedicate this section to understanding how the

Viet Minh guerrilla group conducted social engineering and established tactics to engage with existing Vietnamese social practices. This is because the Viet Cong has built on the existing social engineering tactics employed by the Viet Minh, and in many cases capitalised on the Viet Minh's history and popularity (Tanham, 2006). It is therefore insiffucient to only speak of the Viet Cong's social engineering without acknowledging the work already done by the Viet Minh for almost two decades prior to its regrouping into Viet Cong.

The Viet Minh, formed in 1935 and later re-established as the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1941, freely borrowed common values from Vietnamese society, most often those of Confucianism, and re-interpreted them to fit the narrative of the liberation effort. Much of the Viet Minh's and ICP's skillful use of these concepts, as well as their understanding of peasant consciousness, stemmed from the fact that the leadership, including Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap, came from rural families of Confucian scholars. Ho Chi Minh, for example, studied Confucianism for 10 years before departing to the West, reaching the knowledge level of a bachelor's degree holder (Bui, 2013). However, Confucianism itself, especially its tenets on family, was often criticised by the cadres for being out-of-date, feudal, or simply not fit for the new Vietnamese realities (Brigham, 2011). Confucian advisors, who were particularly influential in villages, were persecuted and jailed (Nguyen, 1998). However, unlike the French, who strived to abolish the sense of collectivity, solidarity, and mutual support that underpinned life in Vietnam, the Viet Minh did not contest the cultural importance of Confucianism. On the contrary, they built on the familiar values and traditions for popular mobilisation, making their consequent victory, as Bradley (2011, p. 318) speculates, 'predetermined'.

The same principles of benevolence and righteousness (with the same terms – *nhân,* which corresponded to Chinese *ren* and *nghĩa*, which corresponded to Chinese *yi*), already familiar to the public, and indeed already used in earlier liberation movements against China, were re-evaluated in light of the communist revolutions. Benevolence now consisted of loving one's comrades and compatriots, and thus not hesitating to wage a struggle against those who harm one's people. Righteousness now included fulfilling obligations towards the ICP – any tasks assigned by the Party, large or small, were to be carried out conscientiously (Bui, 2013). Some revisions were also made with regards to the five key Confucian relationships, with a core sixth relationship added: between a person and a society (Vu, 2009). Self-cultivation, as before, involved cultivating relationships with family and village, but now also included serving one's people in general. In turn, this justified engaging in the struggle for liberation, which was done in the name of fulfilling one's duties towards the exploited people. Some other virtues were further

derived from Confucian teachings but given a Vietnamese revolutionary perspective, to make up the image of an ideal person: diligence (*cần*), thriftiness (*kiệm*), integrity (*liêm*) and honesty (*chính*). 'Integrity' emphasised the importance of not being corrupt ('not stealing even one grain of rice from the people of the country'), and always empathetic to the hardships of the people (Van, 2019). 'Dilligence' referred to working hard to fulfil labour production goals, while 'thriftiness' referred to saving money – whether the money of the people, the Party, or one's own family (Bao, 2013). A person who was striving to be a revolutionary, then, did not have to go against their familiar understanding of what constituted a good person – despite their denials of Confucianism as an ideology, many of the Viet Minh's desirable characteristics already had 'a strong Confucian flavour' (Duiker, 2018). We can clearly see, then, that the guerrilla group used its core ideological principles – the power of the collective, unity of the Vietnamese people, importance of labour – in order to engage with familiar Confucanist sociocultural practices.

The cadres themselves presented behaviour that was in line with the values. The Viet Minh cadres knew that Confucianism required the rulers to show exemplary behaviour; for the Vietnamese villagers, a leader that conducted themselves with arrogance and cruelty lost legitimacy. The cadres then sought to behave according to a Confucian code that would resonate with the villagers. Ho Chi Minh's public persona also projected qualities of the Confucian gentleman with qualities of righteousness, modesty, sincerity (Bradley, 2011). On the other hand, the Viet Minh cadres would point out the failure of the current rulers to exhibit the same perfect characteristics, which they then used as an argument to engage in the struggle against the French regime (Tonnesson, 1993).

The virtue that was both transformed and utilised the most is perhaps that of filial piety. On the one hand, the guerilla leadership insisted that there was no need to continue maintaining family as one of the central units of Vietnamese society, particularly when the agricultural cooperatives to regulate production were established (Khuat, 2009). They also criticised the patriarchal order of traditional Vietnamese families (Pham, 2005). Instead, they sought to introduce a new concept of being liberated/emancipated from one's family to serve the bigger revolution (Jamieson, 1995*).* The recruits were encouraged to leave their family worries behind once they joined the struggle – a good cadre is one that is not weighed down by thoughts about his family and instead focuses their mind on serving the people. Historical records sometimes note that indoctrinated recruits, after coming home, exhibited little care for family matters – their thoughts were with the front (Leites, 1969).

Yet, the same principles of family loyalty and filial piety that characterised family life in Vietnam were extensively used in the context of the revolution. Firstly, the Viet Minh articulated the concept of 'loyal to country, filial to people' (*trung với nước, hiếu với dân*) – a transformation of the older Confucian principles 'loyal to the king, filial to parents' (Tran, 2019). When the recruits left their families to join the guerillas, then, they were not liberated in an individual sense – after all, individualism had no place in the insurgency value system (Jamieson, 1995). Rather, this was done to shift the Vietnamese loyalty from family to the cause of the revolution. In serving the revolution, a cadre liberated the people, including their parents – this, in the eyes of the guerillas, was the true fulfilment of filial piety. Failure to do so would mean failing the people and failing one's parents (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2012). This also allowed for justification to leave the cadres' families, as from the traditional Confucian perspective, going away while parents were still alive was one of the biggest breaches of filial piety. This is strikingly highlighted in the following description of the Viet Minh interrogation. The cadres asked whether a soldier told his parents about his decision to join the forces. After learning that the soldier had not, they said:

> Comrade, your words show that you are a fine son filled with filial piety and we admire that very much, but you have to choose between filial duty and duty to your country. In this war the people are your family too, and you have to suffer. If you do your duty toward your parents – tell them of your decision – then you fail your country. But if you fulfill your duty toward your country, then by the same act you will have completed your duty toward your family, because they will be free and no longer exploited. *(*Halberstam, 2007, p. 92)

4.5.2 The Viet Cong

The Viet Cong further built on the changes that Viet Minh introduced, with many overlaps: the same notions of filial piety, loyalty to one's country, thriftiness and honesty were portrayed to be the desirable characteristics. Vietnamese Marxist cadres who grew up with Confucianist principles continued to incorporate it into their revolutionary lives (Nguyen, 2018). Confucianist and communist doctrines converged on a number of aspects: for example, the idea of collective interests over an individual; the active role of a state (or a ruler) to serve the people; prioritising practical issues over questions of spirituality and death. (Tonnesson, 1993). Ho Chi Minh, then, continued 'dressing Marxist concepts in Confucian clothing' to attract recruits and continue the military struggle – this time against the US and South Vietnamese government (Duiker, 2018).

The socialist government further reinforced family loyalty and subordination in some of their policies, such as in attracting new recruits. Despite continuous attempts to shift loyalties from family to the state, the socialist government also made the family and social ties a crucial component for building nationalist spirit and the anticolonial movement. For example, Viet Cong cadres tried to make sure that at least one family member from each household was a part of the group (Davidson, 1968). They also often persuaded young men, their wives and parents to join the guerillas at the same time; if they needed to send letters of persuasion (for example, in contested areas), they would do so via relatives of potential recruits. Many people who participated in the revolutions often also did so to follow family footsteps. The guerilla group also used family background to judge an individual – a '*lý lịch*' was recorded in an official document which went back three generations (Bélanger & Barbierin, 2009). Again, then, one's reputation and future depended on their family and kin background, thus further subordinating people to their family. Once they joined, the recruits would be disciplined through family loyalty, as they were told that desertion would result in shame for their family – a frequent and highly persuasive argument (Leites, 1969). In doing so, they brought back the notion of loyalty and filial piety to the family, using the familiar ideas of saving not only personal, but also family's face.

Enlistment in the Viet Cong, like in the Viet Minh, translated into the Vietnamese familial model, 'liberating' a cadre from their old family and acting as a surrogate family. The political cadres presented themselves as fathers of the Vietnamese nation, while the younger recruits were presented as their children. The relationship was then organised accordingly, with the cadres in higher up positions expecting loyalty and respect from the recruits (Tovy, 2010). Once the loyalties shifted from family to the Party, men would see the Party's words and actions as justified and beneficial for them. This, in turn, echoed the ways in which children raised in a Confucian way accept their parents' criticism as beneficial (Lanning & Cragg, 1992). Alternatively, some political cadres became 'older brothers' to their men (often referred as '*anh em một nhà*' – brothers from the same family), which is also indicative of their close ties and affection – they were expected to give each other the same loyalty and support that is expected of blood-related siblings (Lanning & Cragg, 1992; Ho, cited in Pham, 2018). The replacement of kinship with communist brotherhood was thus not difficult to get used to – the 'parent-child' and 'brother-brother' relationships are two of the five key Confucian relationships.

Life in villages also transformed – given their importance to Vietnamese people, the strength of the village was closely related to the strength of the nation (Phan, 2015). They were common agents for 'development and social change' (Kleinen, 1999, p. 3), and the first source of protection

and safety during the French and American invasions. During the 1945–1975 period, this was recognised both by the guerilla groups and foreign policymakers: both sides concluded that gaining control of the villages was crucial (Tovy, 2009). This meant that everyday life in the villages was inevitably affected, as they became targets for both nationalist and counterinsurgent policies. The success of either side of the war depended on how well they understood the norms and grievances of the villagers.

In the liberated North, after the communists established the socialist government, they attempted to change the position of the villages in society. The principle of collectivity was applied to include not only one's village, but the country. The villages were no longer largely autonomous, with the states' power becoming inferior once it reached village gates. Instead, they were connected into a national agro-industrial collective (Tonnesson, 1993). The villagers worked not only to provide for themselves, but also for the people in other provinces, for soldiers who were marching to unify the North and the South, and other people who were outside of their immediate communities. The extent to which these efforts undermined loyalty towards the village, and shifted it towards the socialist state, however, remains contested (Tonnesson, 1993).

Everyday life in the villages in the South further changed as the struggle between the Viet Cong and the Americans continued. Routine checks and examinations were conducted by the US to detect any potential guerillas. Despite the fact that the targets of these missions were specifically guerillas, the missions often turned into raids and massacres: many American soldiers were instructed to approach the entire village as an enemy target (Man, 2018). It was not rare for the US to burn entire villages which were suspected of shielding Viet Cong guerillas, aiming to achieve two goals: deprive the Viet Cong from a source of support, but also demonstrate their own strength (Man, 2018). In turn, this meant that civilians could be forced to flee their ancestral villages at any time (Weist, 2009). Despite correctly identifying villages as crucial to controlling insurgency, such frequent raids, village-sweeps, and bombings resulted in a deteriorating relationship between Vietnamese villagers and the US troops and the plan to control the guerillas ultimately failed. This is particularly highlighted by a 1964 New York times article:

> The reason is that they have suffered too often from destructive expeditions by Government forces. Whenever a skirmish occurs, the Saigon air force intervenes and whole villages are burnt down. How can one expect the countryside not to rally to the insurgents in such circumstances?

The Viet Cong's use of existing social norms was not the only way in which they mobilised the masses. Inspired by Maoist techniques, they also placed great importance on changing social and psychological attitudes of the villagers. As Mao himself said, 'the Red Army fights not merely for the sake of fighting but in order to conduct propaganda among the masses, organise them, arm them and help them establish revolutionary political power' (as cited in Atkinson, 1973). The methods available to the Vietnamese guerrillas were diverse: propaganda campaigns, personality cults, study sessions, land reforms… all spread by 'tens of thousands' of trained political cadres (Goscha, 2012, p. 147). The Viet Cong's propaganda was targeted and specific, and appealed to the villagers' hardships, interests, and needs. Sometimes, the propaganda would be subtle – for example, spreading gossip among acquaintances of political cadres; other times, it was more blatant, e.g., setting up public meetings, delivering conduct speeches about the Viet Cong and posting bulletins in most public spaces. Further, propaganda and face-to-face meetings often occurred repeatedly, unlike the one-off public lectures conducted by the Southern government. The propaganda brigades (consisting of about 30 people) often visited villagers. The brigades were often armed but it is unknown whether the arms were real, as some accounts state that the Viet Cong sometimes carried dummy guns and made small-scale attacks on hamlets – not to control them, but to show how strong the group was (Davidson, 1968). Notably, propaganda meetings were also sometimes accompanied by entertainment teams who put on theatrical performances, dances and songs about patriotism or previous revolutions. Reports in Davidson's account also indicate that some people liked to go to these meetings because of the performances.

Like the Viet Minh cadres, the Viet Cong knew that the villagers expected authorities to behave properly – in line with the Confucian code of a leader having to fulfill obligations towards their subjects. As such, their behaviour is reported to be 'gentle, affable, and friendly', always using correct language and avoiding rudeness (Lanning & Cragg, 2007). Part of their conduct was 'three togethers' with civilians: eating, living, and working together. They treated members of the lowest social class as equals, which was well-received by the masses (Davidson, 1968). Living in proximity, wearing the same clothes, behaving politely and helping with farmers' tasks also meant that the Viet Cong were able to gain trust and friendship more effectively, while learning exactly how to target their wishes in the propaganda. Overall, the guerillas attempted to shift loyalties from family towards the communist cause, but in doing so also reinforced already existing loyalties and values. The next section will discuss the implications of all of these changes on Vietnamese childhood.

4.6. Childhood in Vietnam during the Vietnam War

4.6.1 Social norms surrounding Vietnamese childhood on society, village and family levels

Before discussing Vietnamese militarised childhood, I will generally outline what it meant to be a child during peaceful times. Growing up in mid-20th century Vietnam meant facing multiple ideas about what it meant to be a good child. However, despite the influences of French, American or socialist forces, the dominant notion of goodness was still embedded in the Confucian practice and its values of collectivism, duty, and saving face (Burr, 2014). The societal, village and family values as outlined below would be incorporated into children's habitus, shaping their worldview and guiding their actions when it came to their recruitment into the guerilla groups.

On the societal level, children were considered 'little human beings' and invited to participate in daily social life as small members of their community (Rydstrøm, 2003). In line with Confucianist philosophy, childhood in Vietnam was less based on rights, and more on obligations. As such, fulfilling their responsibilities towards family (e.g., doing household tasks, taking care of their parents or siblings when sick, etc.) was essential (Phan, 2006). The deeply engrained notions of collectivism also meant that the goodness of a child was defined by the extent to which they were willing to suppress their needs to serve the greater collective good (Burr, 2014). Being so integrated in society, they also needed to understand and navigate one's own social position in the web of relations, exhibiting an 'extraordinarily fine-tuned awareness' of who is their superior and who is their equal (Fung & Mai, 2019, p. 285). Much of this is already engrained in the Vietnamese language, thus children learn that they exist 'only in relation to others' as they learnt to speak (Pham, 1999, p. 23). Due to these factors, children learnt to respect the hierarchy as early as age five or six. As a result, then, growing up in 20th century Vietnam was consistent with Confucian ethics, even if the children never received any formal Confucianist education.

On the village level, much of what has already been described above about the importance of the village allegiance applies to children. It was their second object of loyalty, coming only after family. It has to be noted that there is much less emphasis on the villagers' and communities' role in childrearing, especially compared to societies in Sub-Saharan Africa where it is believed that it takes a village to raise a child (Mugadza, Mujeyi, & Stout, 2019). In Confucian societies, the responsibility for childrearing is seen to largely belong to children's parents. Consequently, children's loyalty to the village was less due to it directly raising them, and more linked with the

social norm that every Vietnamese person must belong to their native village, regardless of their position and location. One of the first lessons that children learnt was that harmonious life in the village was important and communal standards should guide their behaviour. From an early age, everyone was trained to consider the opinions of people around them, the extent to which their personal desires conflict with what is best for their community, and to discipline themselves accordingly. Otherwise they would be subjected to social disgrace (Pham, 1999).

On the family level, children in Vietnam would be taught that their relationship to their parents is primary. The importance of the nuclear family was maintained since at least the Le dynasty in the 17–18th century, when the parent-child relationship was tight all through one's life (Yu, 1994; Phan, 2006). Parents had an important role to play – they were the ones to teach children filial piety and family loyalty, punishing children if they did not obey. Thus, the children would be cautious to behave appropriately, in a way that protects their family's honour and does not result in their parents losing face – inappropriate behaviour did not reflect well on their parents (King & Bond, 1985). The notions of filial piety remained. Children had to bear an unpayable debt to their parents for birth, child rearing, and education. From early childhood, the Vietnamese child would be taught to 'readily forget himself for the sake of his family welfare' (Le, 2018, p. 172). Not caring about one's relatives has traditionally been considered one of the biggest sins; if one did not care for their family, they were simply viewed as a bad person (Yu, 1994; Malarney, 2020). It would also mean that children's primary loyalties lay with their families, even if it sometimes went against the wider morality as imposed by the state – for example, engaging in illegal work went against the law, but in doing so, children fulfilled their obligations towards family (Burr, 2014).

It is also important to highlight that while Vietnamese social norms require children to be respectful and obedient to authority, this does not mean that children were passive. On the contrary, in the process of growing up and learning about their position in the hierarchy of social relations, children actively engaged with the rules through role-play, teasing, observing other children, and independently coaching younger siblings in the rules of proper conduct. With time, Fung and Mai (2019, p. 300) note, 'they come to understand and appreciate the intertwining nature of good morality and affection in interaction and communication with people in a hierarchical structure'. This is further in line with the Confucian idea of 'freedom' – freedom, for these children, may not be manifested in challenging their status in society, but rather making sense, navigating and striving to understand the roles assigned to them. The idea that children's ultimate virtue was to serve the family also did not conflict with the fact that parents did not interfere with their children's life choices, and they were relatively independent (Yu, 1994).

4.6.2. Militarisation of Vietnamese childhood

The presence of guerillas shaped the Vietnamese 'good' childhood in various ways, drawing on some existing concepts and changing others. For example, below are widely cited teachings of Ho Chi Minh specifically for children:

1.   Love your Fatherland, love your people

2.   Study well. Labour well.

3.   Good discipline, good unity

4.   Maintain good hygiene

5.   Modesty, honesty, and courage

Several connotations are notable in these principles. Firstly, 'Love your Fatherland, love your people' comes as the first and primary principle, thus indicating that within this framework of childhood, the nation as a whole should be the object of a child's love. Family and village are not mentioned and thus less important, representing an attempted change of loyalties from family and village to the country and the people. Secondly, 'labour well' was presented in the same principle as 'study well'. It thus reflects the Vietnamese views of what constitutes a good child: one that not only engages in studying, but also participates in production and the economic life of their family and communities. Combined with the strong sense of duty and collectivity, this might manifest itself as a choice to work despite being underage in order to support their families and siblings. This idea of a good child is not rare among the countries in the Global South – as outlined before, for many children in Southeast Asian societies, childhood is not only a time to grow, learn and play, but also to work (Huijsmans, 2008). It is also normalised in Vietnamese society – Nguyen (2000, p. 94) observed that children were expected to help with household tasks from as young as two years old, and 'their task performance made a significant contribution to the household'. Even during the American occupation, schools accommodated the expectation that children would help their families and work on the fields, scheduling vacations around harvest times. Thirdly, the 'good unity' virtue further draws attention to the idea that children did not exist as free-floating molecules; they existed in a society and needed to cultivate good relationships with people around them.

The second way in which the presence of the guerillas shaped Vietnamese childhood was framing the 'good' childhood as inseparable from participating in the revolution. As villages became epicentres of the liberation struggles, the everyday lives of the children were further militarised: they were now required to help in building bomb shelters, or bring first aid kits and straw hats to school. Neither the Viet Cong nor the Viet Minh specifically targeted children over adults in their propaganda; however, in encouraging mass mobilisation, they inevitably included children as potential participants in the revolution. Ho Chi Minh himself urged all Vietnamese people to work for the revolution, regardless of age, sex or religion (Taylor, 1999). It is also indicative that along with mass associations such as Women's Association, Farmer's Association, and even Buddhist Association, Youth Association was also established. The role of these was to 'involve every member of society in supporting the Front' and 'promote revolution, inculcate national pride, combat the natural passivity of the peasantry, and overcome the dread of fighting a technologically superior enemy' (Taylor, 1999, p. 13). As a consequence, children became more exposed to calls for patriotism and liberation. Notably, there was still acknowledgement that children were young; however, in the eyes of the Viet Cong leadership, childhood was not seen as a barrier to participation in political struggles. The small age was sometimes presented as an asset, as highlighted in Ho Chi Minh's words when encouraging the youth to participate in the liberation struggle: 'Your age is still small. But small tasks turn into big successes' (Ho, 1947, cited in Tam, 2020).

The narratives around children's participation were often embedded in the wider norms around child labour: for example, Ho Chi Minh (1947, cited in Tam, 2020) stressed multiple times that alongside putting all of their efforts into studying, children should contribute to agricultural production and helping with any activities which could be useful to the revolution. To facilitate this, the Viet Minh organised a branch of Youth Pioneer Organisation (originally named 'Children's Society to Save the Nation'). Its specific role (which was different from that of Youth Association) was to distribute leaflets, deliver letters, and perform other war-related tasks to help political cadres. A common slogan was frequently used to address the children: 'Young/Small people do small things, according to their capabilities – to participate in the revolution, to keep the peace' (Ho Chi Minh, 1952, as cited in Tam, 2020). Ho Chi Minh's letter to children in 1951 (cited in Thanh, 2013) demonstrates further the idea that children were not seen as apolitical. His address did not make any references to childhood innocence or the need to protect children's 'ideal' world. On the other hand, they were encouraged to get involved in politics on an emotional level, even if it meant that they needed to engage with negative emotions such as hatred:

You must hate, detest the French colonialists, the American meddlers, the Vietnamese puppets. Because of them, we suffer. You must love, love the country, love the people, love labor. The children must try and help the wounded and the soldiers' families, try to keep hygiene and keep discipline, try to study. You must unite and unite among Vietnamese children, unite between children of Vietnam and children of China, the Soviet Union, other countries and children in the world.

In the context of the war, then, the good children were those that actively joined the war efforts. For example, images of Hanoi children that gathered leaves and branches to camouflage soldiers, or students from Bac Ninh that accepted to tend healthy cows and chickens to sell to cooperatives, were circulated on radio and in newspapers as examples of true 'good' children (Quynh, 2019). A good child was one that did not simply act to support the revolution, but felt the ideology on an emotional level – from intense hatred of the French and the Americans, to the love of their country and the people.

In Southern Vietnam, there were less opportunities for such militarisation on the same level, in part because, as outlined before, the Southern government's propaganda was less frequent and less targeted towards the villagers. Thus, the children that were exposed to these specific narratives would most likely be those that encountered the guerillas. However, some evidence still suggested a strong presence of the already familiar norms of collectivity, filial piety, and strong desire to do good for the community. In a study comparing American and Southern Vietnamese children in 1963, Leichty asked participants to complete the sentence 'I like my mother, but…' American children tended to add something they did not like about their mother (e.g., 'sometimes she gets angry with me'). On the other hand, a large majority of Vietnamese children tended to end the sentence with a statement such as 'but I am still young and cannot repay my debt to her'. American children tended to fear external factors, e.g., the dark and animals; Vietnamese children expressed fear of violating societal norms and personal inadequacy. In hopes for the future, half of Vietnamese children spoke about wanting to do something good for someone else, usually their families; none of the US children proffered a similar response, usually wanting things for themselves (e.g., a swimming pool). This confirmed Jamieson's (1995) and Leichty's (1963) comments that even during the height of American domination, traditional values persisted.

4.7. Conclusion

Overall, Vietnamese history produced a society deeply influenced by Confucian tenets, despite the efforts of various governments to change it. Principles of collectivity, duty, and face-saving remained prominent by the time the Viet Cong started to engage peasants in the political struggle. The guerrilla groups effectively used these values in their peasant mobilisation. Concepts such as patriotism were articulated successfully because the guerillas embedded it in the language already familiar to Vietnamese peasants. On the other hand, while they tried to shift family loyalties toward the country, filial piety and loyalty to one's village remained strong. This resulted in a militarised childhood for those who were born before or during this historical period. The notion of a 'good' child was one that carried out their prescribed duties faithfully, exhibited filial piety, and – for children in the liberated areas especially – participated in the revolution in any way they can.

This chapter has provided the context, within which practices that are continuous to child soldiering, were created. It is within this context – Confucian societal values, strong emphasis on village-community life, and family loyalty, that my interviewees decided to take up arms and support the political struggle. The next chapters explore their lives as shaped by historical forces, culture, and social environment: what motivated my interviewees to join the guerrilla groups, how they experienced war, and how they reintegrated into society after the struggle was over. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that while my interviewees demonstrated a considerable amount of agency and intelligence, their lives before, during and after the war, were continuously affected by the societal and cultural norms.

Chapter 5: Mobilisation and recruitment of Vietnamese child soldiers

5.1. Introduction

This chapter discusses and analyses the recruitment processes and primary motivations of former child soldiers to join the political struggle. I argue that the children's decisions were a product of their personal history and social environment, which shaped the children's habitus, and then predisposed them to become child soldiers. However, the children were not completely passive receptors of their circumstances – they manipulated the same social norms which prompted them to volunteer in order to bypass guerrillas' rules and join their forces while still underage. Understanding the social norms that surrounded the children's actions and how children creatively navigated them allows us to see children's agency at work.

To this end, the first section describes the means by which potential recruits could find and enlist in the Viet Cong, and how the geographical context affected these processes. Section two recounts the most common reasons that were articulated by interviewees themselves as the primary motivations to join the military struggle – a concern for their survival (or the survival of their communities) or following the propaganda which glorified the political struggle. In line with Bourdieu's framework, I then analyse the social context within which these decisions took place. Using this approach allows me to consider how factors such as family, children's own histories, and social norms became a part of the children's habitus and shaped their attitudes and subsequent actions. For my interviewees, the decision to take up arms made sense in the context of their own militarised everyday lives, political predisposal by their families, as well as flexibility of Vietnamese childhood which, at the time, was not separated from performing labour and contributing to one's community. The children also expressed significant concern for political issues, demonstrating that childhood cannot be separated from politics.

The last section explains how each child exhibited an ability to navigate their circumstances and other people's expectations: for example, using the Vietnamese belief that children are expected to work in order to lie to their parents that they were looking for a job and run away to join the guerrillas. It again confirms Bourdieu's statements that creativity and autonomy are possible even within highly restrictive structures. While children were predisposed to take up arms by the norms they grew within, the children's familiarity with these rules also allowed the children

to gain the 'feel' for the extent to which they can renegotiate their own circumstances to achieve their goals.

5.2. Recruitment processes

Before explaining the factors that predisposed children to take up arms, I will outline the general recruitment and mobilisation processes used by the Viet Cong. These varied depending on time and geographical location. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the group followed Mao's ideas of people's war and stressed the importance of mobilisation of all citizens, involving them in all aspects of the political struggle: fighting, production, jobs on the rear of the battlefield, etc.

On the one hand, the Viet Cong preferred to encourage potential recruits to join, rather than threaten or force them (Donnell, 1967). They built on tactics such as appeals to patriotism, peasants' hardships, and previous victories over France and China. The most common recruitment tactic was coming to villages, studying the local social and economic structures, and approaching peasants to talk to them about joining the guerrillas – sometimes a dozen times (Denton, 1968). It also held frequent propaganda meetings with speeches about nationalism and patriotism. The cadres then either asked attendees to volunteer for the guerrillas or picked out those who responded most enthusiastically to the performances or meetings, and visited them separately, often preceding the visit with gathering information about this person (Donnell, 1967). In addition to preferring voluntary recruits, the group have been noted to be quite selective in choosing recruits even during the height of the Vietnam War (Donnell, 1967). It employed multiple checks to ensure the support and reliability of potential recruits and also sought to foster a sense of trust and cooperative relationships between their members.[3] Passing these tests and becoming a part of the guerrilla groups served as a source of pride and sense of achievement for the former child combatants I met. In addition, the guerrillas had an age and weight fulfilment, which potential recruits had to pass. Indeed, one of my interviewees, Quyen, has been denied participation with the Viet Cong because he was underage.

---

[3] Statements of guerrillas' selectivity were also confirmed by my interviewees who participated in the Viet Minh's struggle against France. One female guerrilla, who worked with a local Viet Minh force sabotaging the French sweeps, told me that before she was accepted, the cadres needed to check whether she was 'smart and hard-working enough'. Another interviewee, who worked in the same group, insisted that 'It was harder to join the guerrillas than become a member of the Party nowadays. Back then, they would give you many trial jobs before accepting you'. The trial jobs generally consisted of asking the children to run errands, deliver messages, help to hide weapons, keep watch for the arrival of the enemy soldiers, etc.

On the other hand, there are also some observations of forcible recruitment, e.g., abductions, conscription, or intimidation (Donnell, 1967). They are particularly prevalent during the later stages of the Vietnam War, when the Viet Cong was experiencing a lack of recruits and failed to fulfil its quotas (Rottman, 2007). None of my interviewees referred to being forcibly recruited. However, one interviewee mentioned a conscription experience called 'borrowing age'. It was explained by Cuong, who joined the Viet Cong main forces at 17. He explained that every village was expected to contribute a certain number of men to the front – however, if that village did not have enough men, they would 'borrow age', i.e., families sent their oldest son, even if he was under 18. His family had two sons, both underage. Upon deliberating, his mother asked Cuong to go instead of his brother because he was smarter and quicker, and thus had a better chance of survival. He said that he obeyed his mother 'happily'.

Quyen's and Cuong's recruitment experience are very different: one was denied entry for not fulfilling the guerrillas' criteria, while another was conscripted despite being underage. The two different experiences of recruitment could be explained by the specific timeline of Quyen's and Cuong's enlistment: Quyen volunteered in early 1960s, when the Viet Cong could still afford to be selective with their recruits (as observed by Donnell, 1967). They could particularly be more selective in the North, which is where Quyen was based, because the liberated areas experienced less bombings and less intense battles, thus the need for manpower was lower. It made being rejected by the guerrilla group more probable, although most of my interviewees also volunteered to join in the same time period and were accepted. The recruitment continued to intensify as the war progressed. After 1968, which is when Cuong was conscripted, the 'VC recruits all but dried up' and failed to fulfil their quotas, thus leading to more aggressive recruitment techniques (Rottman, 2007, p. 12). Quyen and Cuong's cases, however, seem to be outliers in the general pattern of my interviewees' recruitment processes. In a more frequent occurrence, my interviewees were not actively conscripted by the guerrillas, but it was not seen as wrong to recruit them, either. The general pattern that arises from these interviews is that theoretically, the guerrillas had strict age, weight, political background requirements – in practice, it was not rare to drop them in favour of mass mobilisation. As a result, many children were recruited even when they did not reach health or age standards, as long as they demonstrated their desire to join.

The recruitment process also varied according to geographical and political factors. As there were more liberated provinces in the North, the Viet Cong recruitment groups had more

opportunities to spread propaganda via meetings, radio, and posters. Children from the North thus were more exposed to the revolutionary spirit and many of my interviewees directly referenced the propaganda meetings as the places where they heard of the opportunity to join the guerrillas. They described the process as being quite straightforward – potential recruits only needed to find where the cadres were located and fill in an application form. In such instances, there were likely to be no dangers associated specifically with the process of identifying oneself as a part of Viet Cong or their sympathisers – i.e., the participants would not be individually targeted or persecuted.

By contrast, most of the territory in the South was controlled by the US-backed Government of Vietnam (GVN) regime that systematically persecuted communists as well as the former Viet Minh cadres. Villages were tightly monitored for potential guerrilla meetings – as an interviewee from Cu Chi remembered: in his village next to Saigon, there were always GVN soldiers patrolling, keeping guard, and watching out for guerrilla activity. Abnormalities in families (e.g., a young man suddenly disappearing) would raise questions from the officials – the ways in which families addressed this issue is described below by one of my interviewees. Thus, the communist operations were more informal and underground. This had two consequences for the prospective Viet Cong sympathisers: firstly, there were no (or very few) meetings and recruitment groups spreading direct propaganda via radio, loudspeakers or posters, making it impossible to achieve the same glorification of the revolution that was present, on a large scale, in the North. Secondly, the recruits that did join the Viet Cong, did so in secret – they often did not know whether their friends or even families supported the guerrillas. Some of my interviewees reported working for the GVN – running errands and doing small tasks for the local military bases, befriending the American soldiers – while at the same time supporting the guerrillas (e.g., providing them with intelligence, stealing American food and weapons using the connections they had built with the GVN soldiers). Given this repression, the process of joining the guerrillas was more complicated and had to be planned in advance. Duc, who grew up in Cu Chi – a district in Saigon which was a location for some of the biggest counterinsurgency operations – witnessed this first-hand:

> In the South, they controlled the population tightly. You know, it wasn't easy to join the fighting, like in the North […] You had to leave your family to go to Saigon to do little jobs, like selling some things, doing factory labour or working at a bakery. They [the GVN] would come to your family and ask where your children are. Your family would say you went to work and they don't know where you are. But if there's a reason for your absence, they wouldn't ask anything else […] And you'd often work for the government officials for a few

months. They'd ask and we would give proof that we worked for the government, like a piece of paper. And then next month – turn around, join the guerrillas. But you couldn't just pack up your belongings and go, otherwise they would hunt your family down.

The differences in geographical contexts, then, meant that joining the fighting in the South required more elaborate planning due to the possibility of being persecuted for associating with communists. In the North, parents might have opposed their child's decision to join but they would not be personally harmed. By contrast, the Southern interviewees had to carefully weigh and consider their actions, as accidentally revealing that they were supporting the guerrillas could lead to harassment of not only themselves, but their families. The circumstances surrounding the recruitment processes – whether recruitment was open or underground, whether the children's families were at risk of being persecuted – shaped the specific motivations of my interviewees, which are explored in the next section.

5.3. Motivations to join: Common themes

This section will outline the two most common reasons that interviewees gave for joining the Viet Cong. The first is a reaction to immediate (often dangerous) circumstances. An emphasis on motivations derived from living in a dangerous social environment was the most evident in the Southern interviewees. This, again, aligns with the fact that the US conducted most of the counterinsurgency operations in Southern Vietnam. Most of the raids, sweeps, and search-and-destroy operations were aimed at villages along the Ho Chi Minh trail suspected of sheltering the guerrillas. When the US and GVN soldiers did conduct raids, they lasted for several days, and involved substantial firepower and use of air cavalry (Starry, 2002; Joes, 2001). These operations frequently ended in massacres, and destruction of as much as 2/3rd of total property held in the village (Huong Thuy People's Committee, n.d). It is not surprising, then, that for Southern interviewees, the primary motivation for joining the guerrillas was the desire to escape and stop the violence. When asked about his reasons for helping the guerrillas with small errands, Hung stated: 'Of course I was afraid, but there was no other way. The enemy was here, I was so frustrated […] If your home was suddenly disturbed, you would do the same'. Similarly, Nhung, who assisted with many different tasks including administrative errands, propaganda and nursing, articulated an intense hatred for the American forces and desire to change the regime which he had felt since a very young age:

I thought how they were constantly killing civilians – I hated them, I thought I would kill them. Because my uncles and aunts all died. There were only a few people in my family who survived. I was ready to volunteer to do anything. They were carrying the strategy to burn everything, kill everyone and destroy everything […] I was only 10–11 back then. You know, they came in and shot everyone. Rice fields – everything burnt. There was nothing left.

Picture 2 Ho Chi Minh with children's performance troupe, 1950

The second common narrative, more prominent in the Northern interviewees who participated in the Vietnam War, was the influence of propaganda narratives perpetuated by the Viet Cong. Since the most intense battles occurred in the South, many of my Northern interviewees did not experience bombings and violence directly. As such, their decision to participate in the struggle was not a reaction to immediate attacks close to home. Rather, they were mobilised to march to the South and assist with large-scale battles there. To encourage youth to leave their homes and assist with the political struggle, Viet Cong employed a carefully curated propaganda strategy, which portrayed going to war in a positive light. The motifs of glory were particularly prominent. Radio broadcasts frequently recounted Viet Cong victories, the exploits of heroic martyrs, and the cruelty of the American forces, almost presenting the struggle as a crusade (Flammer, 2013). Special propaganda teams often read out loud newspapers or news bulletins, which similarly were curated for content to motivate the villagers (Davidson, 1968). For Quan, who joined the guerrillas at 16 years old, it was the honour and glory invested in the political struggle that became his primary motivation: 'You know, at the time, the whole country went to war. Everyone volunteered to join the army […] Everyone was excited to join, the

battlefield was something honourable and glorious, it was beautiful. Everyone was oriented towards it. So going to the battlefield was like an ambition, a longing, among youth back then'. In addition, the political struggle was presented as a struggle for justice, the 'right' thing: it stated that in joining the guerrillas, the recruits would be rescuing the Southern compatriots from the exploitation of American imperialists.

Alongside the motifs of glory, the Viet Cong propaganda also presented the war as exciting and fun. Tien, who ran away from home to join the Youth Shock Brigades at 15, described the atmosphere as festive, even suggesting: 'Why wouldn't you join? The more, the merrier!' This was in part due to the special propaganda meetings held by the Viet Cong, which were frequently accompanied by entertainment troops. In these meetings, there would be musical and dance performances, as well as occasional theatrical acts about various events in Vietnamese history, all performed by young teenagers (Davidson, 1968). The goal of these performances was, again, to raise the spirit of the villagers and motivate them to join the front. Davidson (1968, p. 107) further notes that sometimes 'bogus' volunteers were planted among those who attended, who would applaud loudly and shout 'Long live the Front', again to foster an environment of festivity and excitement.

The motivations of my interviewees, then, reflected the geographical and social context. As outlined in the previous section, joining the struggle was a more straightforward process in the North, where the guerrillas took advantage of the liberated areas to spread propaganda and thus foster an atmosphere of excitement and glorify the revolutionary movement. This was more difficult in the South where the GVN specifically targeted the Viet Cong, thus necessitating more informal and underground recruitment of guerrillas. The children based in the South did not have the same exposure to the atmosphere and spirit that was prevalent in the North as the guerrillas could not openly spread propaganda. However, the biggest battles took place in the South, which meant that the children were directly affected by conflict. Changing their experience of poverty, hardships, and dangerous circumstances became the primary motivation for these interviewees. The similarity was that in both cases, decisions to enlist were connected and shaped by their communities. In the South, even when concerned with survival, interviewees primarily framed their willingness to join the struggle as a way to ensure not only their own survival, but that of their neighbours, village and family. In the North, most of my interviewees were motivated with the idea of glory and excitement, something that was discussed and frequently 'done' within their social environment.

The next sections present a 'thick' reading of my interviewees' motivations and analyses how the context within the decisions of these children unfolded. More specifically, I will examine the political nature of children and their motivations to work with the guerrillas. The interviews indicate that children were embedded in an environment where social justice was an important concern, thus also making their motivations political. Afterwards, I explore various social practices that underpinned children's decisions. These social practices, such as existence of child labour or militarisation of childhood, influenced what was considered 'normal' for a good child to do. Considering these is important to contextualise children's motivations to join the guerrillas, as they played a major role in enabling my interviewees to take up arms and to see it as it as an expected course of action.

5.4. The role of politics in children's motivations

The first factor in the context within which my interviewees were operating is the politicised nature of their everyday lives. Many interviewees referred to their motivations as non-political, where 'politics' (chính trị) referred to an understanding of communism or revolutionary consciousness, often also including notions of loyalty to the state and patriotism. For example, Minh, without my prompt, explained that he did not understand what either communism or the revolution was when he first volunteered to join the main forces at 17. Rather, his primary reasoning for joining the army was the fact that he was 'an active and excitable youngster'. His understanding of communism only formed while already serving in the political struggle – indeed, he constantly expressed gratitude to the Communist Party for providing him with education and a trajectory for personal and professional development. Many other interviewees echoed the same sentiments, frequently denying any 'political' motivations and instead suggesting that they were guided either by a survival instinct, or by the glorified image of the battlefield – the two themes explained in the previous section. It is also noteworthy that the instances of the interviewees (such as Minh) denying their ideological motivations did not clash with their acknowledgement of their current support for communism as an adult. On the surface, these sentiments confirm that children are apolitical by nature and therefore cannot be meaningfully involved in politics – the idea that is prevalent in media and NGOs, as analysed in Chapter 1.

However, at the same time, my interviewees spoke of perceived injustice and wanting to address it at a young age. This was most prominently articulated by Hung, who started helping

the guerrillas with small errands when he was 7–8 years old. Growing up in the South, where bombings and raids were common, he remembered: 'It starts with your dissatisfaction, with your frustration. It was a natural instinct. Suddenly there's someone disturbing your home, burning it. And you are very angry. There's nothing about patriotism – you wouldn't know anything at that age. And there was no education in the majority of houses […] No one knew what communism is. Only knew that America came. So whoever was frustrated and could do it, they wanted to stop them.'

His statement reveals two issues which highlight the role of politics in children's lives. Firstly, in his statement, he equates politics with formal ideologies – communism or patriotism. This is generally in line with Vietnamese definition of politics, which cannot be separated from formally recognised principles (Fforde, 2011). This is the definition of politics which was used by the guerrillas, who often articulated their political struggle as connected to the state, e.g., protecting Vietnam from foreign invaders, or unifying North and South. The 'political' was seen as encompassing the whole country and consisting of formal governmental procedures, rather than being a matter of personal experiences. For Viet Cong recruits, the association of politics with ideologies was even further reinforced by educational sessions labelled 'Political education', which they were exposed to when they became a part of the group (elaborated further in the next chapter). These sessions included meetings, speeches and classes on both patriotism and communism. Consequently, it is understandable that the children did not have much knowledge about communism prior to joining the guerrillas, and that they would perceive their initial motivations as apolitical after being exposed to the formal study sessions.

Secondly, a closer reading of Hung's motivation reveals strong references to injustice, exploitation, and awareness of the US presence, suggesting that children's motivations to join the war were underpinned by political issues. Stories by other interviewees indicate further that children's motivations were political – however, learning and understanding their political nature was a continuous journey. Quyen's story, for example, demonstrates the subtle presence of politics in children's lives from a young age and how he gradually grew to understand it. Prior to volunteering, he remembered gathering to have meals with his friends around a loudspeaker, through which communist cadres would spread news. Although his village did not have radios at the time, he often referred to discussing recent guerrilla victories with his teachers and classmates. In his mind, the image of weapons, soldiers, and battlefields was a beautiful one. 'Some people now say that we were indoctrinated [to volunteer], but it isn't true', he insisted. 'They

just talked about examples of bravery [martyrs], and it touched us. Who would tell a class of primary school children what to do?' Looking back on his childhood as an adult, however, he realised that despite not being aware of formal ideologies, the language of exploitation, social justice, and patriotism, was already strongly present in his thinking. Understanding of 'formal' politics only fully materialised much later, as a result of participation in the war:

> The orientation towards the war was very clear. When they were shooting in Quang Ngai... our spirit really boiled. All we wanted to do was go there [the war]. We wanted to overthrow Diem's regime […] And then in Hanoi [where Quyen was based], there was already big protests. The speeches by the leaders really touched me, they gave me a really strong feeling. Thinking about it now, that's when my patriotism was awakened. But at the time, I didn't think like that. All I knew was that I really wanted to go to the battlefield, the spirit was bright.

Sang experienced a similar journey – joining the Youth Shock Brigades at 15, he again denied having any patriotic feelings or communist sympathies prior to joining the guerrillas. However, he explicitly acknowledges the importance of the guidance and the education he received from the Communist Party once he joined. The following quote implies that he made a distinction between 'informal' politics, i.e., his personal perception of injustice, and the knowledge and skills which he developed as a result of the Party's influence:

> We just saw how other people were exploited, so we were frustrated. But we were so small and didn't have the capability to do anything. But behind us were the leaders [the Party's branches]. The Party didn't directly do much, only instructed how to organise everything. So, you see, there was no patriotism. We saw the injustices and were frustrated, and then the Party said – it doesn't have to be like that. Why are they exploiting you? What should the youngsters do? That's how the unity was formed among the youngsters, under the guidance. The older generation guided the younger. So eventually, it formed an organised movement […] But without the Party, we wouldn't dare to do anything.

Identifying the political nature of children's actions also explains and does not negate experiences of other children – for example, those who were much more assertive about their political rationales and explicitly acknowledged it. The most prominent example of this case is

Tam, who volunteered at 15. Growing up in Saigon, she was already working at a factory by the time she turned 13 and found the regime too exploitative, remembering that 'they gave us two shirts but no trousers', and reported having almost no food while the factory owners would eat well. In her story, the language of social justice and revolution is strongly present. As she and other factory workers could not stand the exploitation, they organised a protest, asking to have their rights acknowledged. The problem, however, was not solved – rather, the factory owners oppressed the workers even more, killing and injuring the protesters. She then remembered that in the end, 'those who were able to, went to fight, and those who couldn't, quit working. Girls directly asked me to participate in the revolution, to fight for our rights […] At the time, I was just over 15 but I already was 'enlightened' [a term used to point out that the participants knew what revolution was]. She further recounted that in the beginning of her work transporting weapons for the Viet Cong, she deliberately left three grenades in the yard of the factory owner 'as a warning: if she continues to live like this, there will be a day when she dies'.

Despite the motivations of my interviewees to join the guerrillas seeming apolitical on the surface, they were underpinned by issues of social justice, foreign presence, and exploitation. Children were aware of these issues and had a strong desire to participate in addressing them. These attitudes were fostered in an environment that politicised and militarised childhood, eventually leading to the children's decision to join the guerrillas. The effects of environment and social history on the children will be explored in further sections, which also evaluates the extent to which the children's participation in the struggle was voluntary.

5.5. Voluntary participation

Alongside asserting that their participation was 'non-political', my interviewees continuously stated that they have made an independent, autonomous choice to participate voluntarily. However, at the same time, they often referred to notions of duty and responsibility. One possible explanation for this contradiction is the communist context within which the war was taking place. As Voicu (2009) observed, volunteering in communist countries rarely involved agency from people and was rather a label for doing unpaid work on the state's orders. In the case of Romania, for example, many movements and organisations labelled as 'voluntary' – even sport clubs – had compulsory membership with little initiative and were fully under authoritarian control (Voicu & Voicu, 2009). Similarly, Chinese soldiers in the Korean war were presented by the Chinese

government as volunteers, 'so apparently incensed by the wrong being done to their Korean friends that they come of their own volition to aid them' (Farrar-Hockley, 1984, p. 293). In reality, they were supplied from depots, conformed to orders and were often not even aware that they had 'volunteered'. This may have also been the case for some of the interviewees – for example, Cuong, who was conscripted as a consequence of the 'borrowing age' policy. However, institutional orders alone cannot explain the many cases when children were stopped from participating by their family or by the guerrilla cadres due to their young age, or – in the case of the Southern interviewees – where there were not many outlets enabling participation in the first place. Furthermore, the perception by some interviewees that their participation was voluntary (i.e., not forced) was so prevalent that many reported it directly affecting the way they behaved in the battlefields, e.g., being more disciplined because 'we knew that no one forced us to be there'. This, then, requires us to look at other factors that predisposed children to volunteering.

The ambiguity of volunteering in communist countries has been explored in Audin's (2017, p. 48) study of retired neighbourhood activists in China, where volunteering is described as 'somewhere between imposition and moral responsibility'. Similar to the cases cited by Voicu and Voicu (2009), calls for volunteers to keep the neighbourhood safe came from local governing bodies. Potential activists still had an option to refuse; the reason why they couldn't, however, was connected to their sense of duty. The calls emphasised mutual belonging to the neighbourhood and stressed that relationships developed with neighbours also created obligations towards them. Potential volunteers would be embarrassed to refuse an offer to keep the neighbourhood safe as that would mean that they are refusing to help someone they had already known. Furthermore, the decision to volunteer was also deeply influenced by 'the norm governing the use of free time for the common good against idleness', meaning that the calls to volunteer used the fact that the pensioners were already feeling anxious over having free time (Audin, 2017, p. 53). The ambiguity of their volunteering, then, lay more within social norms, rather than with institutional calls. For Wu, Zhao, Zhang and Liu (2018, p. 1203) this confirms Bourdieu's notion that 'networks, norms, and social trust can transform contingent relations into relationships with durable obligations'. It is through these relationships that collective action comes into being. In the next sections, I will explore the relationships and social environment, within which the children's decisions took place.

Paralleling the case of Chinese neighbourhood activists', the Viet Cong's all-country mobilisation is likely to be only one factor that influenced the decision of the former child soldiers

I interviewed to enlist, guiding children alongside social structures and personal histories. The concept of volunteering could thus be approached as a social structure in itself – my interviewees were guided by notions that were socially prescribed. This is particularly relevant in Vietnamese society, with its strong emphasis on collectivism. As we have seen in the previous chapter, family loyalty, social scrutiny and group dedication were powerful tools of behavioural control utilised by the Viet Cong. The child soldiers' recruitment, then, was a combination of volunteerism and force. Allowing space for both allows us to consider the children's agency, effort and thought that went into their decision to participate while also acknowledging that their choices were embedded within an environment that shaped and predisposed their actions. The sections below will elaborate more specifically which factors played a particularly significant role in shaping their decisions, focusing particularly on family, labour practices, and militarised everyday life.

5.6. Factors influencing children's decisions to enlist

5.6.1 'Revolutionary' family and the role of tradition

Picture 3 People in Hanoi listen to radio about the "Agreement to end the war and restore peace in Vietnam" that was initialed in Paris, 1973.

In the interviews, family influence featured prominently as a key factor influencing children's decision to take up arms. In line with the claims made in previous chapters, which argued that the family is where the primary habitus develops, the political orientation of family members had a deep influence on my interviewees in several ways. For example, My grew up in a 'revolutionary family' (gia đình kháng chiến), i.e., a family in which at least one member supported the political struggle against the French or Americans. For her, family did not constitute an apolitical space but brought politics into her everyday life and influenced the social environment around her. When she was a child, My's father often brought her to propaganda gatherings, where she met different political cadres: 'It's not like I was determined to participate in the revolution but […] there were uncles and aunts, adults, they guided me. They said, you come from a family where supporting the revolution is a tradition'. She remembered guerrillas accompanying her to see the propaganda performances and encouraging her to choose a profession that would benefit the liberation struggle in the future. My's political outlook, then, was shaped not only by her immediate family, but also by its wider social circle that also consisted of guerrillas. Their arguments that she should follow the family tradition are persuasive given the importance the Vietnamese society places on family loyalty and upholding family honour and tradition. However, My also spoke of the immediate connection between her and her father, linking her participation in the liberation struggle to him directly: 'I understand now that my revolutionary blood is from him'. At 13, after some deliberation, she decided to leave her family to serve as a nurse in the battlefields, purposefully not joining the fighting forces because 'it is too easy to die there'.

In the unliberated South, many families did not have opportunities to openly interact with guerrillas because the Viet Cong's operations were underground and secretive. However, my interviewees, such as Duc, still remembered seeing their families and neighbourhoods resist the current regime using the means available. Because the Southern village-communities could not confront GVN authorities directly for fear of being persecuted, there were many references to peasants employing what Scott (1985) called 'weapons of the weak', i.e., everyday non-confrontational forms of resistance that were deliberate in their subtleness and anonymity. The children's everyday life was shaped by witnessing the struggle and political actions that their families undertook. Duc remembered that his family had steel buckets to carry water or fish sauce, which they used as tools of protest:

> In the evening, after a shout, people would hit and bang on it to make noise. At first, we would hit it quietly, and then everyone else would join. But then they [GVN] couldn't catch

us – we didn't do anything illegal. But it was this unity. But if there was a family that didn't make noise – we'd know that they are on the enemy's side. And then when the officials went to check for the buckets, you'd say – oh, my neighbours were making noise, so I followed them, but I don't actually know anything. I just heard the noise so I joined in […] They would try to find the person who started it, but no one would tell them, how would they know?

In many accounts of child soldiers' motivations, family is often portrayed as a 'push' factor, e.g., a child fleeing an abusive home, parents missing or not being able to provide adequate care (as pointed out by Becker, 2009 or Pugel, 2009). The stories of my interviewees reveal ways in which positive family relations can directly shape child soldiers' motivations. In line with Nolas, Varvantakis and Aruldoss (2017a) observations that the intimacy and bond between family members provides good grounds for political socialisation, it was the relationship between my interviewees and their families that played a major role in children wanting to participate in the war. The multiple factors that shaped their decision to participate in the armed struggle stemmed from the cultural expectation to stay loyal to family tradition, interactions with family's neighbours and friends, as well as the direct political value transmission from the children's parents.

5.6.2 Militarised everyday life

Not all of my interviewees were born into revolutionary families, but the fact that war was still a part of their everyday life shaped their inclination to volunteer. This was the second factor surfacing in my interviews, which was indicated to shape children's motivations. The frequent bombings and raids made violence and militarisation a part of their everyday life from early childhood. For my interviewees, such as Duc and Nhung, witnessing destruction and death, or civilians being arrested despite not being associated with the guerrillas, was also a frequent occurrence. As another interviewee put it: 'I never knew what peace is'. Ratelle (2013, p. 167) observes that in such cases, 'violence is interiorised as normal, and people adapt to it in order to survive'. It often manifests itself in all spheres of life, as children are socialised to function in this environment. Uyen (2019) listed some of the ways in which children adapted to living during wars: always playing next to bomb shelters in case there is a bombing, bringing first aid kits to school, meeting guerrillas frequently, etc. Frequent propaganda talks and news being spread via loudspeakers by guerrilla cadres, politicised their childhood from a very early age. These changes in children's context can be analysed to uncover how, in Beier and Tabak's words (2020, p. 285)

'naturalization of danger combines with valorizations of particular kinds of responses to produce a normalization of militarization'. Jenkins (2014, p. 28) further noted that 'there is an adjustment between an individual's hopes, aspirations and expectations for the future, on the one hand, and the objective situation in which they find themselves', i.e., violent and unstable realities alter perceptions of what is sensible and effective. The children's habitus – their unspoken, unquestioned attitudes and beliefs with regards to war – was shaped by these realities. For my interviewees, such militarisation made the idea of child soldiering realistic and sensible. This was articulated, for example, by Si who stated that enlisting at 17 simply felt 'natural' for him – 'it was nothing special'.

Children's familiarity with the political struggle was further reinforced, not only by the ongoing war, but also by persistent attempts by the Viet Cong to foster friendly relations with peasants and their mass mobilisation campaigns. It brought the guerrillas into close contact with children, who were therefore already familiar with a guerrilla lifestyle before they even made the decision to join the political struggle. Hung, who remembered that guerrillas were always a part of his life in a Quang Ngai village, often saw them working on the fields alongside other villagers. His eventual work for the Viet Cong involved small errands such as stealing supplies, gathering intelligence, and camouflaging the guerrillas' mines. However, his first errands at nine years old were not official missions assigned by the Viet Cong; he saw it as help for the people he knew and was familiar with. The first time he stole a gun from the Americans to bring to the guerrillas, it was as a favour for the guerrilla uncle that Hung initiated himself. He overheard his uncle talking about how the American equipment was bigger, heavier, and more beautiful than that which Viet Cong used. Hung then offered to go up to the American base and steal it for the guerrilla, to which the cadre laughed and said: 'You're joking'. It was only later that he began receiving official missions to complete. Before that, however: 'It was a favour [for the guerrillas]. The uncle said he liked it [the gun], so I gave it to him. I got it for him as a gift – it's nothing, no problem at all'. For those interviewees who came from revolutionary families, the struggle was physically brought right into the home when their families sheltered guerrillas. For example, Ngoc referenced her mother cooking food for the Vietnamese army and guerrillas, and lying to her that it was for pets. Eventually, however, she found out and worked with her family to host, cook food for and take care of the guerrillas. Another interviewee also reported regularly making meals for the guerrillas as a child, even though she did not understand exactly who the guerrillas were.

While children may not have cooked and helped the guerrillas with specific goals to enlist, the possibility of taking up arms was readily imaginable if guerrillas were regularly present in their lives since their early childhood and if they had an opportunity to meet and interact with them and understand their motivations. The importance of strong bonds between guerrilla groups and the population they live in is well acknowledged. Shah (2013, p. 494) for example, observed that it was the intimacy, 'friendship and commitment' that sustained the movement of Maoist guerrillas in India. Similarly, the respect and willingness to understand the peasants' personal stories, helpfulness and strict code of conduct adhered to by the Viet Cong cadres fostered positive relationships between them and the peasants. It was in stark contrast with the relatively impersonal propaganda methods, distant government officials, and frequent indiscriminate violence employed by the Southern government against villagers, which only served to undermine the relations between the GVN and the civilian population (Maranto & Tuchman, 1992). As American commentators at the height of war noted, it thus came as no surprise that children wanted to join the Viet Cong guerrillas (New York Times, 1964).

With respect to the interviewees of this study, violence, militarisation, and marginalisation eventually led to the desire to address the inequalities in a way that they thought was the most realistic and normal. These sentiments, often alluded to by my interviewees, were not directly expressed as reasons they joined – only described as part of their childhood. However, it is these unspoken factors – the previously internalised knowledge of how guerrillas and their sympathisers acted, as well as the moral codes and social practices the children acquired through the guerrillas' propaganda while growing up – that enabled them to take up arms more easily.

5.6.3 Notions of a 'good' childhood

The impact of living in a militarised environment on children's motivations to enlist, was further underpinned by the many Vietnamese societal notions with regards to a 'good childhood'. The first feature of Vietnamese childhood in the mid-20th century, which facilitated children's enlistment, is that it did not always correlate with a specific age. Many of my interviewees often did not know what year they were born in and had to ask their relatives to look at the official records (other times, their official records were incorrect, and the interviewees stated both dates – that on their official record, and that which they knew to be correct). Others were uncertain as to when exactly they joined the guerrillas and used other ways to measure their age – for example, one woman recalled: 'I got married when I was 17, so that must've been before then'. This

flexibility of the chronology of childhood, in turn, had implications for children's expectations concerning their duties and capabilities. For example, My did not find anything unusual about her starting to work as a nurse at 13: 'I participated from a very early age, I was 13 […] At that age, one could participate in the war, I was already mature, definitely transforming into a woman'. Despite asserting that she was a grown-up at 13, she later noted: 'At that age, you are supposed to sleep and eat well'. She did not deny the existence of biological differences between children and adults; however, for her, this also did not contradict the fact that she should be participating in the war effort. Her statement is further in line with Huijsmans' (2008) observations of a 'good' Southeast Asian childhood as time not only to rest and play, but also work and contribute to family and community.

The second feature of Vietnamese childhood, stemming from its flexibility, was the expectation that children carry out various responsibilities and duties from a young age. It was common for my interviewees to have been employed elsewhere prior to joining the political struggle, which prepared them for carrying out various jobs for the guerrillas later. The most common types of work were being a helper in someone else's house, a worker in a factory, or helping provincial committees. Some children were not formally employed, but nevertheless regularly helped their families with farming and tending animals. In these cases, child soldiering was a continuation of jobs the children had done before and still conformed to their cultural expectations of children's duties. Particularly relevant here is Vinh's story. Growing up without a father and having to take care of his mother and sister, he studied until the 7th grade while simultaneously helping his family. He then joined the Youth Association at sixteen and helped to organise finances for the provincial committee. I asked what he did in the two years between 14 and 16 years old, and he replied that he did 'nothing, just staying home'. I clarified whether he helped his family on the fields and he responded: 'Of course, I harvested and tended the buffaloes'. To him, then, labour on the fields did not count as a type of work, rather becoming something mundane and routine. When he joined the guerrillas, his main tasks were in the kitchen – to cook and prepare meals, alongside running small errands such as maintaining the camp, buying food, cigarettes, or coffee. For Vinh, these tasks were in line with the things he had done before – thus, taking responsibility and carrying out various duties was already a part of his everyday life. Indeed, for many other interviewees, their initial jobs for the guerrillas were similar to the tasks they had already been performing: cooking, doing small chores, drawing, and aiding propaganda. For interviewees who had started interacting with guerrillas at an even younger age, such as 9-year-old Hong, these tasks were incorporated into their daily lives at home. Her family

started sheltering the guerrillas when she was very young, and she explicitly remembered guerrillas asking her to buy different products or to knit clothes and scarves, which she could easily do while carrying out other everyday chores.

The third societal factor that regulated the children's motivations, attitudes, and actions was rooted in collectivism. Within a society where community is of central importance, children were already expected to take responsibility and contribute to communal life. In the militarised context, the expectations for children shifted from helping with production to assisting with tasks that would benefit the war effort. This was, as we have seen in the previous chapter, a result of the Viet Cong framing war participation as a duty towards one's community: family, neighbours, village, and the people. In line with this message, many former child soldiers, such as earlier mentioned Nhung, Sang and Hung, articulated their motivations as primarily looking for a way to protect their community and their family. This was also a particularly strong motive for another Southern interviewee, Duc. After witnessing raids in Cu Chi, his decision to join the guerrillas as a spy at 14 years old was shaped primarily by the desire to change the lives of the people around him: 'It was to do with our frustration with the exploitation. The anger, the hate. Those were the feelings. It wasn't about patriotism. You just saw that that person, and that person was exploited. The peasants were exploited by the landowners. It makes your heart angry'. A statement from another interviewee alluded to the fact that similar practices have persisted in Vietnam, as he presumed that I would do the same in similar circumstances: 'Imagine, you want to protect your mother and father; you want to protect your brothers and sisters. Of course, you have to take up arms'. These statements highlight the role of children in their community, and the importance of carrying out their responsibilities in order to fulfil their vision of a good childhood.

As the guerrillas' social engineering and mass mobilisation campaigns progressed, overwhelming support for the guerrillas was almost 'bordering on hysteria' (Marr, 2013, p. 383) and voluntarism became a norm. This is particularly true for the liberated areas, where every family was likely to know many people who joined the political struggle. Davidson (1968, p. 77), for example, states that in their interviews for reasons to work for the Viet Cong, 'many respondents say simply that everybody' did. Those who did not join the military service, performed labour and production. The line between civilians and guerrillas was blurred, which is also one of the features of the 'total' war (Goscha, 2012). A consistent theme in the propaganda material was that victory was inevitable, and that youngsters all over the country are joining the political struggle – as such, other children should join the ranks, too. This resulted in intense social scrutiny of

whether children were carrying out their now widely presumed duty to support the war effort. Opper (2020, p. 218) recounts an instance of villagers mocking draftees: 'Why did you have to be drafted? Why didn't you volunteer? You are cowardly kids!' The social ties and public opinion worked as an effective behavioural control tool. Such observations were made by some of my interviewees, who stated that it would have been impossible to avoid joining the war without facing judgement from their peers and fellow villagers. In a collectivist society, such judgement can be a powerful motivator. This is perhaps best encapsulated by a statement of one interviewee: 'There was of course another thing – not like envy, but something similar to… if all of your friends are going, why aren't you going?' For these children, the fear of being left behind, not fitting in, and being criticised proved to be a strong reason to join the guerrillas. The power of social judgement has been similarly observed by Donnell (1967, p. xii), who acknowledged that while many recruits join the Viet Cong out of grievances and economic deprivations, a large part was motivated by 'desire to win glory, or perhaps just the respect of their community'.

Although almost half of my interviewees were women, those who explicitly referenced a concern with potential negative social judgement if they did not join the war, were men. The gendered nature of this sensitivity to social condemnation as a motivation to take up arms was explained by Minh: 'Of course I had to go, otherwise women would laugh at me'. The impact of criticism was so strong that it drove another interviewee, Quyen, to find any possible ways to leave the village and assist with the war effort, despite having legitimate reasons for not joining the guerrillas at 14 (he was not allowed to go by the cadres due to being underage): 'But the social pressure is really strong. You will not be able to stay home. Women say: everyone went to fight, how can you, a youngster [while normally referring to youths, this term normally refers to young men], stay home, still working on the fields and carrying vegetables? […] Sometimes they would say things that would really make me angry'. These gendered differences appear to endorse Rydstrom's insight that Vietnamese boys are brought up to respect and protect the notions of 'honour' and 'obligations' much more than girls (Rydstrom, 2006). It can help explain the stronger degree of social judgement they faced if they did not carry out the prescribed duties (i.e., to join the war effort).

This is not to say that girls did not face any expectations or judgements. Women were recruited actively and were expected to help with all aspects of the political struggle, from military operations to production and morale maintaining (Taylor, 1999). The Viet Cong often appealed to examples of several prominent women who led rebellions against the Chinese, as well as a Vietnamese traditional saying: 'if the enemy comes, even the women will fight'. As part of the efforts to mobilise

women, the Communist Party developed the 'Three Responsibilities' campaign (as cited in Le, 2005):

1. To participate in production and other activities in place of men who have left to fight
2. To manage family affairs and encourage men to fight
3. To support the Front and the fighting

These campaigns and appeals demonstrate that women were expected to hold both supporting and leading roles in the political struggle. In particular, as Donnell (1967, p. xvi) observed, they were expected to help with mobilisation because they were 'respected in Vietnamese society […] and whose judgment and valour can be expected to have a powerful psychological effect and moral influence on the young men'. The gender norms affected my interviewees, too. This is particularly reflected in one woman's statement that 'of course' she had to join the struggle: 'As a woman, I had to go and organise everyone, so they follow me'. It is significant that she referred to herself as a woman, despite starting to participate in the war at around sixteen or seventeen. She was not the only interviewee who perceived herself at the time to be a woman despite being young – this can be explained by the flexibility of the Vietnamese childhood framework. Her perception of her role as a woman – to organise and lead – also echoes Donnell's comments about the powerful influence of women in Vietnamese society. The sentiments articulated by my interviewees, then, not only highlight the importance of 'fitting in' and avoiding being criticised, but wider societal concerns over children's duties and expectations.

5.7. Children's appropriation and negotiation of social context

The decisions children took to participate in the war effort, then, were constrained and predisposed by various factors and circumstances, thus positioning them on a continuum between voluntarism and social imposition. However, the interviews also indicated that children did not passively accept indoctrination or the prevalent norms of their social environment. Within these restricted circumstances, they still managed to navigate and negotiate their social context, which manifested in two ways. The first was in critically thinking about their surrounding environment and demonstrating a willingness to question their own preconceived notions and stereotypes. For example, like many other interviewees coming from revolutionary families, Hong indicated the important influence of her family on her decision to join the guerrillas. From a young age, she

helped her family shelter and provide food for guerrillas. Despite being surrounded by the propaganda of the Southern government, which portrayed communists in an unfavourable light, she was willing to challenge her own previous opinions after directly interacting with them:

> Back then, the propaganda was that Communists are like monkeys, but I thought that those Communists are very heroic, very strong, very beautiful. So I thought, those puppet-government soldiers – they are lying! The communists are like this – why are they calling them names? I asked my father […] He said, here, look at me, I am a Communist, just like Uncle Ho. You see, are we skinny, are we weak?

Even after frequently interacting with the Viet Cong cadres, she indicated that her decision to join the political struggle was not reinforced externally. Instead, it came as a consequence of her own independent thinking and deciding, for herself, what would be appropriate behaviour: 'Those activities [sheltering the guerrillas] made thoughts appear in my head. I was a child of a family like that, with parents like that – how should I behave?'

It is also important to note that the interviewees described their childhood experience as one where their opinions and wishes were seen as valid and worthy of respect by adults. For example, parents in revolutionary families did not always expect their children to follow their footsteps. In the case of Hong, who asked her father to let her join the guerrillas, it was explicitly forbidden at first, as he thought that she was too weak to carry out physically demanding tasks in the war. However, later he reconsidered his decision with the only caveat being that if she absolutely wanted to go, she could go on one condition: that she completes her mission without deserting. Otherwise, he would disown her: 'This is a revolutionary family; if you desert, you will affect our honour. He said, whatever it takes, do your best'. Despite personal disagreement, then, Hong's father still gave her the space to make a considered choice, independent of his opinion.

The second recurrent theme that emerged in the interviews was the fact that the children often endured many difficulties and had to engage in elaborate planning in order to join the struggle. As mentioned before, it was not rare for children's request to join the guerrillas to be denied at first, by both cadres and their parents. Many of my interviewees, then, made extra effort to persuade the group commanders to let them join. The most straightforward way was to argue with the cadres. One interviewee was turned away due to being underweight but argued that he was only skinny then and would gain weight after eating and training with the guerrillas (the cadre

laughed and agreed with his logic, thus letting him join). Similarly, Quan, who volunteered to join the Viet Cong at the age of 16 to become a sapper, demonstrated a strong determination to persuade the initially hesitant cadre. He remembered:

> When I went, I was too young and too skinny. At the health check, the doctor rejected me from the beginning because of my weight. So I cried, I pricked a finger and wrote a letter of determination [with blood]. I didn't have enough blood, so I had to ask an older friend for his blood to finish the letter. Then, after begging for a long while, the doctor said, okay, now let's do this: you and I will run 7km. If you can do it, I will accept you. So I agreed. After about 100m, the doctor said: 'Okay let's turn back, that's enough'. After we returned, he wrote on the medical record: 'Underweight, but with potential to develop'.

Similar patterns are seen with children whose parents did not want them to join the struggle, prompting children to negotiate and plan their departure. For example, when Sang's father tried to discourage him from joining the Youth Shock Brigades by describing how hard building roads is, he insisted that: 'With your strength, and your personality [it is notable that he did not mention age as a possible impeding factor], you will not be able to do it. And once you go and aren't able to do it, you will come back. And if you come back, I will not take you back'. Sang, however, told his father not to worry and to trust that he will not return without finishing his mission, to which his father agreed. Quyen was in a similar situation. When his mother found out that he was going to join the Youth Shock Brigades, she cried. He then had to 'act more adult' and tell her 'not to be silly', further using various arguments to persuade her to not be upset, e.g., by telling her that the family knew many people who had joined the political struggle at an even younger age than he was at the time. In addition to highlighting the ability of children to negotiate and defend their position, these exchanges further demonstrate that regardless of personal beliefs, parents trusted the children to make the choice they thought was best.

Some of my interviewees did not negotiate and instead came up with elaborate plans to hide their intentions and run away from home. A particularly striking example can be seen in the case of Lan, who grew up in Hai Phong. Her father had died in the war, and her brothers both joined the struggle. If she also enlisted, she would leave her mother alone. In a Confucian society which places high importance on family, this would be a serious breach of filial piety. However, after attending a propaganda meeting held by the Youth Shock Brigades, she felt that 'the opportunity has come to me'. Her thoughts to contribute to revolution echo the aforementioned sentiments

that in contributing to the political struggle, recruits would liberate their parents along with the country, and thus also carry out filial piety (Halberstam, 2007, p. 92). She then reasoned with herself (thus also showing willingness to think critically) that 'I can contribute to the revolution if I stay home, but I can contribute more if I go'. She chose to write a letter of volunteering and instead of negotiating with her mother, left in secret. While doing so, however, she demonstrated a significant amount of planning and consideration for her mothers' feelings, as well as determination to control her own emotions:

> While I wrote, I still didn't let my mother know that I'm going. I remember, the night before leaving, I lay in bed and cried. My mother asked: 'Why are you crying?' I said: 'The province chose me to go to study cultural education for women and children, for 10 days, at the town school'. She asked: 'it's only 10 days, why cry? When you marry, are you going to cry, too?' So that [not letting the mother know] was easy.

> The next day, that was 22 of December, the youth branch met me. I volunteered on one condition: no one must let my mother know where I went. I was there for about 4–5 days, when my mother found out. She went up to the base and called for me. But I was afraid that if I met my mother, my determination would disappear. So I hid in the squad. We wore uniforms, wore rubber sandals and caps, so she couldn't see who her daughter was. She searched for me for those 4–5 days, she couldn't find me, cried and left.

It is also notable that while the expectations of 'what is done', e.g., expected child duties, guided the decisions of my interviewees, children demonstrated an ability to adapt to and manipulate these norms and use them in their plans to run away from their family. For example, the expectation that children engage in labour and production was used by Xuan to join the Youth Shock Brigades. Knowing that her parents were likely to object to her joining the war effort, she lied to them, saying that she was going to find a job in another town. She was even careful to explain that the job did not pay very well, thus providing an excuse of why she would not be able to send money back home. She remembered: 'My parents just told me – okay, do as you wish. Just find a job that fits your health and do it. That's fine. We don't need your money, just go if you want to'.

The children's actions, overall, echo Madsen's (2012) observations outlined in the previous chapter about the meaning of 'freedom' and 'agency' in Confucian societies. In a society with a

distinct hierarchy and strictly assigned roles, 'agency' does not always mean the ability to leave or choose not to fulfil one's obligations as desired. Rather, it manifests itself in fulfilling one's role with as much creativity and dedication as possible. My interviewees, similarly, were limited by their circumstances. However, their agency was displayed in a choice to fulfil their socially determined roles, using the existing social practices to achieve what they believed was a 'good' childhood. In doing so, they demonstrated ability to plan, navigate, and understand social and political circumstances around them.

5.8. Conclusion

A theme which appeared consistently throughout the interviews was that the social environment was a major factor impacting on children's decision to join the political struggle. Whether children participated because they wanted to help their neighbours and communities escape exploitation, or because they were affected by the attitudes of their family and peers, their decisions were not made in a social vacuum, but directly shaped by the social environment. This, then, echoes Schlichte's (2014) point that community – whether real or imagined – plays a significant role in combatants' decisions to join. The motivations of my interviewees were further shaped by a desire to cultivate and maintain social relationships and to establish their own position in society, while also carrying out the expectations surrounding good childhood. The interviews demonstrate that the templates and predispositions of the children's habitus were not formed independently but reflect the environment in which they grew up.

Exploring the children's environments and social histories also helps to understand the political nature of children, as well as their voluntarism. Firstly, the interviews reveal that many children had already displayed concern for political issues such as social justice and exploitation at an early age. For some of them, understanding their political concerns was a journey that progressed as they spent more time with guerrillas; others were more explicitly political even before they started participating in the political struggle. In both cases, the role of politics in children's lives was significant. Secondly, their voluntarism needs to be evaluated in light of the social structures that prescribed duties and responsibilities to 'good' children: protecting their community, paying attention to the opinion of people around them, and exhibiting loyalty to family values. These two issues – social structures and political lives of children – made children's enlistment to the guerrilla ranks a realistic and even desirable decision. These attitudes and patterns of behaviour were also

shaped much earlier than traditional approaches to childhood assume, thus challenging the idea that young children cannot be political or proactive in their actions.

Despite being predisposed and constrained by their circumstances, the actions taken by my interviewees are in stark contrast to the typical victimised portrayals of child soldiering. They took pride in the creativity and hard work it took to join the political struggle. The quotes above highlight that from the children's perspectives, serious thought went into their decision to participate. Such elaborate thoughts and plans demonstrated children's intelligence, ability to predict and navigate their social context. There is a possibility that these answers were influenced by the interviewees' desire to be perceived as strong and independent, especially given that they knew that I was collecting research for a foreign institution. However, such portrayal still reflects the collective image and expectations of children in the Vietnamese culture – it is reasonable to assume, then, that children were generally expected to participate in war and not thought to be completely uninformed and agentless. My interviewees continued to display such creativity and agency during their time working with guerrillas, as will be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 6: Child soldiers' experience of living and fighting with guerrillas

6.1. Introduction

In this chapter, I continue analysing the ways in which children were shaped by, and operated within, life with guerrillas. As we have seen in the previous chapter, many factors have contributed to children's decision to take up arms; they were predisposed to do so by their environment, social practices, and circumstances. Their time as guerrillas reinforced children's thoughts that their mission was beneficial for Vietnam, or that they should learn to withstand hardships. Such socialisation directly affected children's performance when carrying out their missions and tasks, impacting the meanings they attached to their participation in the revolution and the extent to which they followed rules.

After describing the training and socialisation in the guerrilla groups, I explain the jobs that the former child soldiers I interviewed carried out. This is done in order to contextualise children's experience: whether children belonged to local guerrilla units or Youth Shock Brigades had a major impact on their subsequent time in the war. I then locate children's positions in the guerrilla units in relation to their comrades and other fighters, and analyse how it impacted children's experience. The next sections explore children's work in more depth – specifically, how they made spaces which they could control and navigate by displaying creativity, intelligence, and resourcefulness.

Two conclusions can be made from the responses my interviewees provided about their time as guerrillas. The first is that they were in positions of subjugation due to their young age; however, their childhood did not necessitate guerrillas' presumptions of helplessness or vulnerability. As a result, most of my interviewees were treated as workers in lower ranks within a hierarchy, expected to learn with minimal guidance, and taking responsibility for their actions. Girls had to face additional layers of hardship, as the guerrillas did not take into account their needs and desires. Even within structures that severely limited their freedom, however, children learned to demonstrate resourcefulness, claim control over some circumstances, and ignore or reinforce the rules they learned. Secondly, children's internal lives and thought processes about their life as guerrillas reveal that children were not stripped of their childhood through working with guerrillas. The accounts of my interviewees frequently alluded to playing, singing, joking, which

many interviewees identified as distinctly childlike activities. Perhaps more importantly, they also showed high social awareness, empathy, and willingness to cultivate meaningful relationships with their comrades.

6.2. Becoming a guerrilla

6.2.1 Military training

After joining the guerrillas, new recruits were trained in their respective jobs to go from inexperienced peasants to capable fighters, nurses, or spies (among many other types of work). I have already shown how some of my interviewees referred to their political education and training in the earlier chapter. This chapter provides more detailed information on Viet Cong's training and education process.

The training guerrillas received was quite inconsistent as it depended on many factors, including the vulnerability of the educational base to outside attacks, availability of cadres, and equipment (Rottman, 2007). In general, however, local guerrillas who were tasked with fighting and harassing the American staff in their own villages were taught how to handle weapons, shoot grenades, and tactics in combat such as crawling or camouflaging hiding spots (Tanham, 2006). Sappers learned to differentiate bombs, defuse landmines, hook wire, coil ropes, alarm on enemy activities (Elliott & Elliott, 1969; Turner, 1999). Medical assistants received some training in providing medical help, although some reports labelled this training as rudimentary (Goscha, 2010). Those who served in the main forces had the most systematic training and more individual instructions: they studied how to use more difficult weapons, rehearsed military tactics, etc. (Rottman, 2007; Tanham, 2006). They were also sometimes taught by Chinese or Japanese instructors who had real-life experience of combat (Tanham, 2006). Long criticism sessions, where one member criticised themselves or others, were the 'favourite Communist device' for training their members (Tanham, 2006, p. 33). They were a common occurrence regardless of the jobs new recruits trained in; political cadres used them to evaluate improvement of the whole unit. The guerrilla leadership believed that criticism, rather than physical punishment, was the best way to maintain discipline and awareness (Leites, 1969; Donnel, Pauker & Zasloff, 1965). As Rottman (2007, p. 17) observed, this could be particularly effective for Vietnamese people, as loss of face, or 'being forced publicly to admit faults, mistakes, and omissions was something that

proved extremely difficult for them to accept'. In these sessions, high-ranking cadres would also praise good performance of a specific recruit or criticise someone who had not performed well enough (Davidson & Zasloff, 1976). Recruits, then, would be subject to honour or shame – both very powerful behaviour-controlling tools in a collectivist society (Rottman, 2007).

Training was often very short: for example, Popkin (1963, p. 154) states that 30% of the guerrillas 'had no real training at all', and 70% had 'less than two months'. This was confirmed by many of my interviewees, who remembered that they only trained when the senior guerrillas had time. Specialised jobs required longer periods: Anderson, Arnsten and Averch (1967) referenced this training period to be three months for sappers, while medical staff trained for about a year (Donnell, Pauker & Zasloff, 1965). In more extreme cases, new recruits were trained on the job and with minimal supervision – such was the case of Youth Shock Brigades tasked with building roads and assisting guerrillas on the rears (Guillemot, 2009). This also held true for some guerrilla units, as the leadership insisted that new recruits would learn more on the real battlefield, than in the training sessions (Carrier & Thompson, 1966). I will elaborate more on my interviewees' experience with training in sections below. During the operations, newer guerrillas would be watched by their supervisors, and sometimes corrected on the spot (Cooley, 1966). The operations were then evaluated in study sessions, where both recruits and cadres had an opportunity to discuss the operation, what went well, and what could be improved.

6.2.2. Political education

As many of my interviewees indicated in the previous chapter, it was common for new recruits in the Viet Cong to have very little knowledge about political ideologies prior to joining the guerrillas. For many, understanding of patriotism, communism, and other concepts, was largely shaped during the time they spent with the guerrillas. Much of this is due to the fact that the Viet Cong, like many other groups inspired by Maoism, placed very high importance on political education of their new recruits – 'a classic form of socialisation' in insurgency groups (Gates, 2017, p. 682). Vo Nguyen Giap (2015), one of the most prominent Viet Minh commanders, repeatedly declared political education is as important as military training for a soldier. This attitude was continued through the Viet Cong, where 'political training', as Taylor (1999, p. 55) notes, 'was endless'. Indeed, the group felt that weaponry was less important than troop indoctrination, and thus dedicated more time to political education than to specialised military training (Tanham, 2006).

As such, study sessions had a constant presence in the life of a guerrilla; whenever they were not fighting, they were studying (Leites, 1969).

The political education sessions were organised in lecture-format and conducted in small groups. The contents were diverse, but centred around similar themes. Most prominently, the training made sure to convey to recruits the mission and goals of the guerrillas: to expel foreign colonisers, to hate the enemy, and carry out the mission of the country's salvation (Taylor, 1999). The recruits were taught that the struggle will be a long one, and they should not expect a victory in a few years (Ralph, 1967). On the contrary, they should be determined to fight for as long as it takes. In addition, they were instructed to be 'brave and heroic', and behave according to the unit's rules: to speak politely and softly with the villagers, not to engage in horseplay, not to steal or behave rudely to other civilians, not to drink etc. (Elliott & Elliott, 1969, p. 40; Leites, 1969). In other instances, the recruits studied Vietnamese history and politics – for example, one of my interviewees remembered learning about the 'mirrors of bravery', i.e., martyrs who were hailed as heroes in previous Vietnamese rebellions. There were also lessons where recruits listened to current events – these centred around victories of the guerrillas in another province or misdeeds of the GVN staff (Davidson & Zasloff, 1966). Some political classes also touched on class relations. Even illiterate guerrillas were taught on the writings of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh (Davidson & Zasloff, 1966). In the training, the guerrillas frequently appealed to the personal interests of peasants, citing their exploitation by wealthy landowners (Leites, 1969). Davidson and Zasloff (1966) remark, however, that the class consciousness was less prominent in the guerrillas' teachings – even the most indoctrinated fighters often had little real understanding of Communism and Marxism. For most Vietnamese guerrillas, the political education stressed national liberation.

Political education cultivated compliance and discipline by discouraging the recruits from asking questions. Rottman (2007) observed that if they asked too many questions, they could be suspected of being infiltrators. Sometimes, recruits' probing questions (e.g., 'We are all Vietnamese, why should we fight each other?') would be ignored by the cadres completely, and they would be told to follow the commanders anyway (Leites, 1969). Indoctrination was further facilitated by the fact that guerrillas were taught to be extremely careful with what they say: they could never say anything negative about the group – otherwise, they would be subject to criticism and re-education (Davidson & Zasloff, 1966). Such systematic indoctrination helped cultivate loyal and obedient fighters with a clear sense of mission. Since political education courses were

frequent, they also served as a way to re-affirm the recruits' ideological stand and boosted morale continuously throughout the years.

6.2.3 Cultivating guerrillas' identities

Beyond political and military training, guerrillas consistently employed practices to socialise new recruits to become a part the Viet Cong. This is perhaps most prominent in the way the guerrillas attempted to remove existing family loyalties from new recruits. Those joining the groups were described as being 'emancipated' (thoát ly) from their families (Jamieson, 1995). Thoughts of family were not supposed to weigh down a guerrilla during their missions; their primary affections should lie with their comrades (Leites, 1969). It is in this period, when a recruit was removed from their home, coping with unfamiliar circumstances and physical stress, that the guerrilla group attempted to replace family as a new object of the recruits' loyalty and replace their old relationships (Donnell, 1967). The commander was often referred to as a 'father', political cadres were seen as 'mothers' of the unit, while comrades considered 'brothers' (Donnell, Pauker & Zasloff, 1965, p. 29). During the training period, new recruits were not allowed to visit their families, or indeed have frequent contact with the people, as laid out in one document on military training (Elliott & Elliott, 1969). This sentiment was also confirmed by Quyen, although he also noted that training and missions sometimes required the recruits to travel very far – even if they wanted to visit their family, it would be difficult and dangerous. In turn, such detachment from their old loyalties was portrayed to be good for the guerrillas' family, as it would enable the fighters to carry out their missions successfully, liberate the country, including their parents (Halberstam, 2007; Leites, 1969).

Squads, sometimes divided into smaller cells of 3–5 soldiers, ate, slept, and worked in the same spaces with little privacy. Donnell, Pauker and Zasloff (1965, p. 25) cite their mottos to be 'inseparable in work, combat and death', as well as the expectation that they would be prepared to sacrifice their lives for each other. In turn, it further strengthened group socialisation. They were strongly discouraged from fighting and quarrelling among themselves, which had led to even defectors and American observers noting that squads were remarkably cohesive (Leites, 1969). The guerrillas were taught to identify with their squads; they were praised or criticised as a single unit (Cooley, 1966). During the criticism sessions, the members were encouraged to participate actively in evaluating each other's performances. An observation made by Donnell, Pauker and

Zasloff (1965, p. 27) indicates that the discussion and expression of one's thoughts tended to 'clear the air', made it 'difficult to bear a grudge' against their comrades. In turn, it contributed to cultivating a closer bond between soldiers in squads. Such deliberate attempts to socialise guerrillas not only helped the new recruits to cope with separation from their family, but also resulted in increased loyalty and identification with the group. This was also indicated by my interviewees, many of whom reported being extremely homesick during their first days with the guerrillas. However, they also directly referenced new friendships and comrades as a source of comfort, which helped them to forget their homesickness very quickly (I will retell this in more detail below).

In addition, political cadres and squad leaders worked hard to maintain the morale of their fighters and eradicate any factors that would make their loyalty towards the group waver. They were instructed to erase pessimism and instil confidence in their fighters, so that participation in the war was still associated with positive emotions (Elliott & Elliott, 1969, p. 40). As a result, commanders avoided negative topics such as enemy's advantages or mentioning cadres' families (Leites, 1969). The inevitable hardships, such as life in the jungle, were described as beautiful, noble, and necessary (Jamieson, 1995). Commanders were instructed to watch closely the unit's morale and behaviour: one captured document shows a special section where cadres evaluated the recruits' morale after each indoctrination session, e.g., who was the most and least enthusiastic (Elliott & Elliott, 1969). If there were signs of morale weakening, they would conduct new indoctrination sessions.

Even in their spare time, the guerrilla groups continued to express loyalty with the cause and encouraged internalisation of the groups' indoctrination. For example, propaganda poems and songs were recognised as a method for political indoctrination in instructions for military trainees (Elliott & Eliot, 1969). The songs were an extremely prominent part of the guerrillas' life, often held during the guerrillas' spare time or even during work (Guillemot, 2009). Many of my interviewees noted that these performances played an important role in maintaining their own morale and providing a necessary break from work. They found joy and experienced feelings of pride when listening to or performing these songs. Through singing, sentiments of unity, camaraderie, and mission glorification, were very prominent, as seen in a song below (translated by Jamieson, 1995, p. 256):

We are people from four directions, all emancipated from our families, gone out,

Meeting each other in the greater family, guerrilla troops, the troops of liberation.

When near each other, we live happily in a feeling of love,

With an ever-stronger spirit of comradeship, tender and inexhaustible

We live together side by side, sharing all during fits of hunger,

Each bowl of rice, each dry morsel.

[…]

We love one another, together in one spirit,

The spirit of struggle to preserve our country.

Socialisation into the guerrilla groups, then, occurred on multiple levels: through criticism sessions in military training, political education, and in new recruits' everyday life as group leaders worked to maintain morale and cultivate positive relationships within the group. Between studying and working, as one former guerrilla in Davidson and Zasloff's (1966, p. 45) interviews stated, 'people had no time to reflect on what was going on around them', which further strengthened loyalty and obedience.

The extent to which socialisation was successful, however, remains unclear. On the one hand, there was a clear effect of continuous discipline and criticism sessions, as my interviewees consistently showed concern for 'face-saving' as one of the factors which kept them from deserting and motivating them to be dedicated to their activities as guerrillas. For example, when I asked Quyen whether he thought about giving up and deserting, he said: 'If you run away… it's very dishonourable. Furthermore, it's very dangerous […] So in deserting, you will not only lose your life; you will lose your honour, too'. His answer is very notable in that it almost equates losing one's life and one's honour. On the other hand, my interviewees admitted that they were more likely to listen to their leaders and internalise lessons from political education classes, because they had made a conscious effort to join the guerrillas. Sang, a member of Youth Shock Brigades who had to convince his father to let him join the struggle, stated: 'You have to understand, no one forced me to be there. So suddenly […] the process (of socialisation) became very deeply ingrained in my mind'. However, beyond my interviewees, there are records of defectors who left the guerrilla groups for multiple reasons, including homesickness and harsh living conditions, suggesting that guerrillas' indoctrination was not always effective (Donnell, 1967).

It also has to be noted that the socialisation process itself was not uniform for all guerrillas. As will be shown below, some guerrillas could carry out their assignments without leaving their

families; for them, the idea of being emancipated from their families was not applicable. Others did not become an official part of the guerrilla groups, only helping them from the rears. This was true, for example, for Hung, whose 'training' to steal grenades from American soldiers consisted of talking with other children and sharing each other's experience.[4]

Nevertheless, even in these cases, some form of education and indoctrination was included. Those of my interviewees who did not leave home still referenced going to political education sessions on days when they did not have to carry out any missions. In these sessions, too, they studied, listened to cadres' explanations of class relations and Vietnamese history, and sang songs about patriotism. When carrying out their missions, they were similarly encouraged to treat each other with affection and see their squad as a single cohesive unit. Over time, like their counterparts in the jungle, these recruits would also come to identify themselves as part of a close-knit group fighting for national liberation.

6.3. Working with guerrillas

6.3.1 Types of jobs

After (or during) training, guerrillas began their respective jobs. They performed many activities, belonged to different organisations, operated in different locations with varied access to resources, which resulted in unique experience for all of my interviewees. The organisation and unit determined whether guerrillas operated in their home village or were sent to remote locations; whether they lived in the jungle or in the valleys close to villagers. It affected the jobs and labour they performed, as well as their living conditions. The jobs of my interviewees can be broadly categorised in three groups: working for local guerrillas, main forces, or as rear support.

Local guerrilla units (du kích địa phương) were on the lowest level of the military organisation, but nevertheless served as the 'backbone' of operations (Tanham, 2006, p. 22). They frequently operated in their own provinces and were largely able to continue their everyday activities, being a 'farmer by day, guerrilla by night' (Rottman, 2007, p. 10). As Rottman (2007) observed, these

---

[4] Similarly, when I asked one interviewee who worked as a messenger in the Indochina war about who taught her different tactics to hide documents, she said that she had to think of these herself: 'No one taught me, we just had to have our own ways'.

units had equipment which mostly depended on what they could secure, while their training was similarly short, irregular, and depended on availability of senior cadres (this was further confirmed by Viet Cong documents captured by the US Department of Defense, as cited in Cooley, 1966). Their main tasks, as outlined by Vo (2015) involved 'defending the villages, participating in production, and combining with local forces and regular army in the preparation of the battlefront as well as in the attack'. More specifically, these guerrillas harassed American bases and supply storages, transported food and weapons, mined and destroyed roads to sabotage operations from the enemy, etc. To a lesser extent, some of my interviewees joined the regular forces (bộ đội chủ lực). These units were generally better trained and better equipped. Their main role was to conduct large-scale offensive attacks (Nguyen, 2014). As Tanham (2006) notes, their tactics still resembled those of guerrillas. For example, they carried little equipment, needed less logistical support and as a result, were very mobile, marching across the country with 'considerable ease and speed' (Tanham, 2006, p. 80). In turn, this meant that fighters belonging to these forces operated outside of their provinces and often lived in the jungle.

The work of the fighters was significantly supported by those who worked at the rear: porters, nurses, cooks, messengers, propaganda cadres, and many others. Most of these supporting roles were performed by local villagers – often women and children – as the guerrillas placed very high importance on the total mobilisation of all people. Sometimes, due to the nature of their jobs, the rear workers could not operate directly from their village, although most still stayed in the proximity of the province. This was the case with nurses, who could not work from their home but from medical bases; on the other hand, children who acted as messengers for the guerrillas could do it without leaving their village permanently.

An important part of rear support specific to the Viet Cong were untrained Youth Shock Brigades. Established during the later years of the Indochina war, they became an essential part, and eventually the 'forgotten heroes', of the Vietnam War (Guillemot, 2009, p. 18). As seen in the previous chapter, some children could not join guerrillas due to being underweight or underage – for them, joining these brigades was an alternative way to participate in the war. In the liberated North, about 2.5 million youngsters signed up to be a member of the Youth Shock Brigades (Le, 2015). They took most of the jobs of the rear, which was reflected in their slogan 'arrive to the battlefield first and leave last' (Le, 2015). 'Arriving first' meant that Youth Shock Brigades built roads to transport the Viet Cong troops, dug tunnels to shield them, carried weapons and equipment to the battlefield. By 'leaving last', they cleared the battlefields, carried wounded

fighters (unlike the American forces which could transport their wounded combatants by helicopter, the guerrillas used humans or animals) and performed simple medical duties. They lived and operated according to the guerrillas' regime and discipline; for example, similar to guerrillas, Youth Shock Brigades had to adhere to rules of proper conduct, and always speak gently and politely to the villagers. Their work was essential to the outcome of the struggle. It was the Youth Brigades that built the 16,000 km underground tunnels along the Ho Chi Minh trail with minimal training and using only simple equipment – shovels, hoes, and nail hammers (Guillemot, 2009). These tunnels were not only used for hiding and sheltering the guerrillas, but also as offence sites: for example, hiding under tunnel covers and firing at the enemy forces so they remain undetected (Rottman, 2006). Unlike local rear support forces, Youth Shock Brigades were very mobile, reflecting their slogan to 'be anywhere they are needed, go wherever there are enemies'. However, they mostly served in some of the most dangerous locations along the Ho Chi Minh trail (Weaver, 2010).

6.3.2 Physical and psychological hardships of the war

Regardless of the jobs they undertook, my interviewees indicated that working for the guerrillas was not only characterised by emotional hardships such as homesickness or constant fear of death – it was also a physically demanding task. This was particularly true for guerrillas and Youth Shock Brigades who were required to live in the jungle, away from their home provinces. They acutely felt the lack of food, water, and clothing. Allowances and salaries generally varied between units and depended on resources. For guerrillas, it is often suggested that they received no salary and relied on villagers for food; if they were paid, the amount was 'meager' (Davidson, 1968, p. 11). Reports by Vietnamese veterans suggest that sometimes guerrillas had 100 grams of rice to eat every day – quite often, it was the only food available (Phuong, 2019). Similar numbers were remembered by my interviewee, Vinh. He admitted that he was in a more privileged position, maintaining a camp for Laos' cadres, who were given better food because they were 'foreign friends'. Even then, he remembered that dying of starvation was perhaps a bigger threat than bomb raids to him – during some of the worst months, each person was rationed only 400 grams of rice per month. Youth Shock Brigades were in a similar position with regards to food and salaries. Elaborate data from Guillemot (2009, p. 31) describes: 'The available data on food rations are shocking. Regulations stated that each recruit was to receive twenty-four kilograms (53 lbs.) of rice per month, but bombings and other disruptions frequently caused rations to

dwindle to almost nothing. Consumption sometimes dipped to as little as four kilograms (9 lbs.) per person'.

Indeed, my interviewees, when answering the question 'What was the most difficult part of the war?', frequently described the hunger, lack of sanitation and prevalence of illnesses. Hong, who we have seen joining the guerrillas after her father changed his mind, remembered being so hungry that it was difficult to see. Some of their difficulties were extremely specific: Si was part of the main forces, and thus participated in many battles, facing death and injuries very frequently. However, it was the lack of salt provision which he found the most troubling: 'It makes me shiver just thinking about it, even today'. Such were the consequences of operating in the hot, humid jungle: guerrillas and Youth Shock Brigades were in a particular need of salt due to sweat. Yet, the food provisions were too irregular to provide it. Another interviewee, Cuong, similarly referenced the lack of salt as being one of the most memorable wartime experiences, recalling that guerrillas almost never put it in food to avoid waste. Instead, they ate unsalted rice and vegetable broth while keeping salt grains wrapped individually. Whenever they wanted to have some salt, they would take out and lick a grain, then put it back in the wrapping paper.

Local guerrillas or rear helpers who lived in their home provinces and thus did not depend on food rations, were still not protected from the physical effects of the wars. Villagers also suffered from poverty and hunger – after defeating France in 1954, Vietnam was 'one of the poorest and least developed countries in Asia', with many villagers confirming a life full of hardships (Bryant, 1998, p. 241). Bombing raids were still a common occurrence, inevitably shaping the villagers' lives. As Duc remembered, during his childhood, he spent as much time in his family's bomb shelter as he did in the house. Whenever bombings began, they would study, sleep, and eat in the bomb shelters, using oil lamps as a source of light. Sometimes they would study there even when there were no bombings, afraid that fighting could break out that night. The next day, everyone's nose mucus would be completely black from inhaling the lamp's smoke.

Physical labour was also a regular part of life, especially for the main forces and Shock Brigades, who travelled thousands of kilometres on foot to the South. Si remembered walking through jungle on blistered and swollen feet, sometimes without any shoes – the shoes that were distributed to the units, were rarely of the right size. They often did so while carrying heavy weight – food, equipment, or weapons ('I carried 30 kg of food at the time', remembered one former Youth Shock Brigade member). Many of my interviewees, especially women who were part of

Youth Shock Brigades and thus were responsible for carrying equipment and food for guerrillas, mentioned that they did not understand how they were able to carry such heavy loads. Both Youth Shock Brigades and local guerrillas also frequently described the labour of digging tunnels. Apart from digging – a physically demanding task in itself – this job also required handling the soil, carrying it to dispose in the nearest lake, and camouflaging it with leaves, different soil, and tree branches so that the enemy forces do not detect the tunnel.

Overall, then, working for the guerrillas was emotionally and physically demanding. The Viet Cong knew this, and thus put much effort to socialise, indoctrinate, and train their recruits to endure hardships (i.e., by seeing suffering as necessary and beautiful, or simply by requesting their fighters to withstand it) and cultivate loyalty to the guerrillas' cause. While it was not always successful, as records of defectors indicate, it still transformed a large number of new recruits into loyal group members, who – regardless of the jobs they undertook – were dedicated to their mission and assignments. The next sections will explore more closely the children's position in the guerrilla groups and how they navigated the new environments.

6.4. Children's position in guerrilla groups

6.4.1. Locating children within hierarchies

Having established how children worked with guerrillas, I will now elaborate the position of children within the Viet Cong hierarchy. Life in the Viet Cong guerrilla units was characterised by both strict hierarchy and general equality, reflecting both their military organisation, Confucianist roots, and communist ideals. This, in turn, affected children's experience: on the one hand, guerrillas attempted to promote equality and mutual respect between different echelons, and most of my interviewees reported never feeling discriminated because of their age. Many even reported enjoying special treatment, as their youth and subordinate position allowed them to do less work or receive extra food. On the other hand, there were still many indications of strict hierarchy, whereby children were subject to discipline and tight control from their commanders. In this section, I will demonstrate how children's position in the guerrilla groups, despite guerrillas' attempts to promote equality, was ultimately one of subordination.

I will firstly examine equality of treatment within guerrilla groups. The guerrillas' attempts to treat everyone equally was indicated even by defectors. One defector reported high ranking cadres always speaking to them in a friendly and equal manner; they were close and 'never fought among themselves' (Leites, 1969, p. 188). In the case of another defector, the relative equality of the high and low echelons was one thing that he specifically did not like about life with the guerrillas. Cooley (1966) further noted that few bodies were recovered by the GVN because the guerrilla unit members never left their comrade under any circumstances, even in death. The general reports by my interviewees echo observations by Rottman (2007) that during their life with the guerrillas, personal concerns were seen as less important than collective needs. Indeed, Xuan recalled nostalgically that at the time, there was 'nothing personal, no one thought about themselves'. She remembered, for example, that once she needed to go home and the whole unit gave her their monthly allowance to help her travel. From the accounts of my interviewees, it becomes apparent that the sense of camaraderie was extremely high in Viet Cong regardless of guerrillas' rank.

There were some instances of lower ranking guerrillas being criticised by higher ranking cadres, but not being able to do so the same towards their seniors; however, 'statements of this sort are surprisingly rare' (Leites, 1969, p. 24). A similar opinion is expressed in Sang's statement, who, despite being very afraid of punishment and discipline, felt that the relationship between high ranking and lower ranking cadres was equal and they were mutually respectful of each other. He felt comfortable pointing out their shortcomings, if needed. Similarly, Quyen recalled: 'There were no beatings. If someone did something wrong, he'd get criticised. Young, old – it'd be the same. The young could call out the old, saying something like – "it doesn't matter that you are my commander, what you did is not good"'.

Many interviewees also noted that they enjoyed 'special privileges'. Numerous interviewees recalled adults bringing sweets, extra food or drink to children. My remembered that despite her work as a nurse with the guerrillas, she did not have to do physical labour, such as chopping wood or picking vegetables. Instead, she did tasks such as writing reports, while older guerrillas carried out more physically demanding tasks. Vinh similarly said that he felt very grateful to adult guerrillas because he was able to sleep longer and work less, but enjoyed the same amount of food as everyone else.

On the other hand, the presence of hierarchy was still very strong. As Rottman (2007, p. 45) observed, in the units, every person had a 'distinct place and role'. The leader was a 'father-like' figure who worked harder than other members, carried responsibility for the whole unit and promoted mutual wellbeing (Rottman, 2007; Leites, 1969). Lower echelons of guerrillas were responsible for carrying out tasks assigned to them, but often did not know the big picture of the operations (Rottman, 2007). Within this hierarchy, most of my interviewees were in subordinate positions. For example, children who worked as messengers often did not know exactly what documents they were delivering and had no acquaintance to the person that was going to receive them. Even Quyen, adding to his earlier reflections about relative equality in the criticism sessions, stated that while they were free to point out shortcomings of adults, children would still need to listen to their orders.

Children's subordinate position in the hierarchy is also highlighted by the fact that they had to abide by the discipline and rules of the guerrilla groups. Doing otherwise would not result in physical beatings, but would still result in the 'loss of face' which, for my interviewees, was a powerful enough punishment. It was indicated by several interviewees expressing a specific fear of being disciplined by higher ranking commanders for not carrying out their tasks correctly. It became an important factor shaping the children's life in the military. Sang, for example, noted that the possibility of being criticised was one of his primary motivations to always do his best on the battlefields. A story by another interviewee, Ha, also demonstrated that children generally had little say in these criticism sessions. She remembered being assigned a mission to carry a backpack with important documents, money, and radio to another unit in the valleys. A guerrilla saw that she was too small for the backpack and offered to carry it for her. They walked on a train railway that Ha had walked on many times before, and thought it was safe because nothing had ever happened to her while walking there. However, that night, they were attacked by the GVN. The male guerrilla died, while Ha survived by pretending to be dead. She then remembered not being able to retrieve the backpack and thinking that perhaps losing the documents while dying would be better than losing them and living; this way, she would not be criticised. Inevitably, she had to face criticism from higher ranking guerrillas, who accused her that 'I didn't want to protect important documents, but let other people take care of it'. She described her reaction: 'I said – we were from the same village, he saw that I was walking with a big backpack and he wanted to carry it for me. I didn't think of anything. That's the truth'. In the end, however, she said that 'If I am criticised, I will just accept it'. It is also notable that this story was told in response to my question

about the most memorable experiences in the war, suggesting the extent to which this incident made an impression on her.

One of the illustrations of how children's place in the guerrilla groups was equalised while still maintaining their subordination is reflected in language used in the guerrilla groups. Language, as Bourdieu (1991) noted, can reinforce established social structures and systems of dominance; as an individual learns how to speak in different contexts, these become a part of habitus. As we have seen in Chapter 4, Vietnamese is a relational language: there is a different word for 'I' for different situations, and the speaker is constantly defining their position vis-à-vis the conversationalist. Age, power positions, and level of formality in their relationship affect the way the speaker and their addressee formulate their sentences. For example, a child addressing an older person should know their gender, their age relative to the child's parents or grandparents, whether there are existing kinship ties, etc. While there are many factors which affect the pronoun usage, age is the most important: it is one of the first questions Vietnamese people ask their acquaintances, so that they can adjust their pronouns accordingly. The child would then change addressing and personal pronouns and be expected to use appropriate markers of politeness and formality in their sentences, which their older conversationalist would not be expected to do. In this sense, speech constantly reinforces and redefines social relationships between the speakers – in turn, it translates into different power relations. Nguyen (2016) observed that between siblings, older brothers ('anh') would have more power than younger ones ('em'). They have more freedom to use informal pronouns to call their younger siblings, which may be considered rude outside of the family context (mày – tao), and the younger sibling would have to accept it. Growing up in this environment, Vietnamese people, including children, learn to be extremely sensitive to their own relationships to other people and their position within the societal hierarchy.

Guerrilla groups attempted to change the pronouns used in their daily lives, thus also changing the power dynamics. Many of my interviewees worked with people of 30–40 years old, who could be old enough to be at least younger siblings of their parents. In these situations, the correct pronouns would be 'cháu' (equivalent to 'nephew/niece') for the children, and 'cô/chú' (aunt/uncle) for their addressee. Speakers of Central or Southern Vietnamese dialects often use 'con' instead of 'cháu', which literally translates to 'son/daughter', making the relationship more familial, but denoting similar age differences between the speakers. Yet, according to many of my interviewees, within guerrilla units, the pronouns were deliberately changed to 'anh (for men)/chị (for women)' to refer to older comrades (older brother/sister), while referring to themselves as

'em' ('younger brother/sister'). Markers of politeness, commonly used by younger people towards their elders, were often dropped. In other cases, as described by Sang, no pronouns other than 'đồng chí' (comrade) and 'tôi' (neutral and formal 'I'), were used during the job; however, outside of work, the pronouns switched to 'older brother/sister'. The deliberate change in pronouns is still used today in many Vietnamese workplaces, with an aim to decrease the age difference and shift the relationship from paternalistic to more collegial.

It is important to note, however, that while the use of different pronouns minimised the age difference, it did not completely alleviate it. As we have seen, even pronouns referring to 'older brother/sister' and 'younger sibling', come with set power relations and social hierarchies. Younger siblings are still required to listen to their elders and accept that sometimes their older siblings have more freedom when choosing how to treat them. Children, then, were constantly reminded of their own position in the guerrilla group. Further, the pronoun change could not be suggested by children themselves; this would be seen as rude and entitled. As such, while children enjoyed some equality and attempts to minimise the age difference as much as possible, this was still done on terms of the system where they were in subordinate positions.

Here, it has to be emphasised that while my interviewees were in subordinate positions, which inevitably affected their treatment, the accounts do not indicate that the guerrillas saw *childhood* as potential grounds for sentimentality or discrimination. On the contrary, many of the Vietnamese expectations of childhood have continued to persist in the guerrilla groups and reflected the assumption that children should work and be relatively independent. This was indicated, for example, in how Youth Shock Brigades, despite being largely comprised of teenagers, received almost no training and were expected to learn on the job. One of the slogans of the organisation was 'Khắc làm, khắc biết', roughly translated to: 'You'll know once you start working' (Guillemot, 2009). Quyen, who we have seen in the previous chapter struggling with being shamed even though he had reasons for not joining guerrillas (they rejected him due to his age), described arriving at the site of the job during his first days as a Youth Shock Brigade member. His group saw some of the tools for the first time and received almost no instructions with regards to how to build roads, apart from someone reading a brief manual for the group. He then recounted:

> We did everything ourselves. We learned it from each other, no one taught us. No one taught me how to cut stones, or how to use a hammer. But we still managed to learn it, day by day. You look at other people and how they do it. Then you learn: one person has

to hold the rock, and two people need to use hammers. Click, then rotate again. No one knows it professionally, it's just self-taught, comrades telling each other. 15–16 year olds, just doing it by themselves.

In part, such autonomy in children's jobs was likely to be an unintended consequence of the little training that guerrillas and Youth Shock Brigades could afford to provide. However, in taking for granted that children will learn to do the jobs themselves, the guerrilla groups still demonstrated the unspoken presumption that children are not subjects in constant need and care. They were expected and trusted to be independent in coming up with their own solutions, without much teaching or guidance.

Even the privileges that children enjoyed were likely to stem from Confucian hierarchal rules, rather than their childhood. As seen in chapter 4, Vietnamese Confucianism dictates that leaders are expected to portray exemplary behaviour – displaying greed or laziness by political cadres would be seen as not fulfilling their assigned role properly. The guerrilla groups understood Confucianist rules very well. Therefore, they understood that being leaders, they would also need to yield to those below them, as indicated by a popular Vietnamese proverb: 'yield to those below you, respect those above' (Truong & Hallinger, 2015). Therefore, children had to be obedient and respect the guerrillas' discipline to be a good group member. However, guerrilla leaders also needed to practice yielding or giving up certain privileges as part of their duty fulfilment.

6.4.2. Gendered structural constraints

Within the guerrilla group, girls' position as subordinates was further complicated by their gender. In theory, the Viet Cong treated everyone equally (Taylor, 2014). Turner (2002, p. 94) observed that women 'were almost never denigrated as burdensome distractions from the work at hand, especially by the men who worked closely with them' and noted that the problem of sexual harassment was not recorded to be common. Some authors noted that communist cadres could be criticised or purged for raping, molesting, or even flirting with women (Davidson, 1968; Leites, 1969). Donnell, Pauker and Zasloff (1965, p. xiii) suggest that the communists' conduct protocol required a 'strict, puritanical sexual code'. Others suggest that it was less to do with puritanism as much as it was with more pragmatic ideas that cadres could not focus on their duty and complete their missions if they were distracted by sexual activity (Taylor, 1999). Turner (2002)

offered another explanation, observing that harsh living conditions made survival the primary – often the only – concern. The hardships of guerrilla life, health problems, lack of privacy in the jungle, led to little room for concerns over romance or sex. Another problem was morale: a woman in Turner's study (2002) also suggested that the guerrillas were afraid that if women were routinely harassed by men in the battlefields, morale would be endangered – a very important factor for groups which otherwise had little resources. While condemning rape and illicit sexual activity, the guerrillas were discouraging but generally tolerant of romantic relationships, realising that prohibiting these would lead to alienation of potential recruits (Turner, 2002). However, they urged their fighters to wait until after the revolution to marry and have children (Taylor, 1999). In cases when women did get pregnant, guerrillas sent them home where women could provide better care for the children, sometimes with marriage certificates to protect them from judgement by conservative neighbours (Turner, 2002). One of my interviewees, Tam, did mention having a boyfriend – a comrade in her squad when she was about 19–20 years old. Their relationship was short, as he later died in an attack; however, her account did not indicate any condemnation from the unit commander.

Despite guerrillas' efforts to promote equality, the influence of Confucianism had meant that women were in disadvantaged positions relative to men. This was particularly reflected when women struggled for positions of power. Nguyen Thi Dinh, the first female general in the Vietnam War, herself noted that both American and Vietnamese men 'do not like to talk about women generals. Even Vietnamese men, and we have a history of famous women generals…' (Pelzer, 2015, p. 107). It is also illustrative that she is the only female general in the Vietnam War, and portrayals of her character in the Vietnamese sources praise qualities which are traditionally associated with men, e.g., 'strong' and 'steadfast' (Bac, 2020). Overall, there was much resistance from the guerrillas to women's leadership: Turner (2002, p. 105), for example, cites guidelines issued by the Communist Party which request that male Party members 'overcome their belief that 'women cannot lead but must be led'.

The same disadvantaged positions also resulted in power relations with regards to sex and romance: although most sources suggest that rape in the guerrilla group was not a common problem, there are still records of women being pressured to sleep with their male comrades (for example, Quinn-Judge, 2001) or enter relationships with them Guillemot (2009). In the case investigated by Guillemot (2009), both the girl and her boss who were discovered to be in a relationship were subject to shame, with the girl facing group social pressure and the boss being mocked for abusing his power by the rest of the group. Nevertheless, as Turner (2002, p. 104)

states, 'erotic sentiments' were more likely expressed by people outside of the guerrilla groups, rather than the women's comrades. In particular, girls were very vulnerable to sexual violence from the American soldiers, whose rape of Vietnamese women is much more widely recorded (Weaver, 2010, p. 5). There are still, however, very few records on the issue of rape and sexual violence within and outside the guerrilla groups, especially in the Vietnamese sources. Questions of rape and sexual violence, as Weaver (2010) points out, carry a stigma for women victims. In turn, it results in secretiveness and unwillingness to share their experience with researchers and journalists. Nevertheless, the few accounts that do exist demonstrate that girls' bodies were vulnerable to the men exercising 'a certain form of masculinity that implicitly demanded destruction of women' (Weaver, 2010, p. 62).

When I raised the questions of gender-based violence and discrimination in my interviews, the female interviewees spoke of being generally comfortable around male guerrillas, mentioning that they 'didn't know anything at that age'. Tien, for example, explicitly said that love and relationships 'were for older ones, but we were school students, we weren't developed yet'. Lan remembered that even at 21, she 'didn't know anything'. When her first boyfriend (not a guerrilla), invited her to his house 'we just slept in the same bed every evening. I met him the other day and he teased me – how could I be innocent back then? But I really didn't know anything'. The extent of how comfortable my female interviewees were around men is shown in Hong's account. She once had to treat a male guerrilla about her age (16–17), who was hit by a bomb. His genitals were burnt, and she asked him to remove his trousers so she could clean and disinfect the area. He did not let her, saying that he did not dare to take off his uniform in front of her, a girl. In her words: 'I said, comrade, you have to listen to me, it's my job. So he did. The sand, the soil – it got all in there, his skin was completely sore. I took a pair of scissors and cut, it hurt very much. And there weren't any antibiotics or anything'. She then took him to the hospital, remembering: 'Afterwards, we got teased – you have to marry him now! You've seen all of it!'.

While sexual violence did not surface as a major problem in my interviews, the presence of war still resulted in wider structural violence against women. In expanding the definition of violence, as Anglin (1998, p. 145) states, we can include instances when 'persons are socially and culturally marginalised in ways that deny them the opportunity for emotional and physical wellbeing, or expose them to assault or rape, or subject them to hazards that can cause sickness and death'. In describing the aftermath of Haiti's earthquake, for example, Rylko-Bayer and Farmer (2016, p. 50) point out that beyond immediate deaths, the deaths and disease resulting from lack of clean water, shelter and poor medical care revealed multifaceted structural violence,

which was largely avoidable. Similar issues were faced by my female interviewees: the lack of resources and poor living conditions resulting from the fighting were most acutely felt by girls. In the Vietnam War, described as 'predominantly masculine', which was 'for men, against men, led by men', women's needs were marginalised or completely ignored (Guillemot, 2009, p. 47). My female interviewees frequently mentioned the effect of the lack of water on girls' menstruation. Water was already so scarce that some of the children had to drink their own urine to stay hydrated; however, when they did have water, it was prioritised for food and drink.

Different girls dealt with their periods differently, as indicated by two former Youth Shock Brigades members' interpretation of their circumstances. Girls in Xuan's unit had to travel further to streams and rivers in order to wash themselves (thus potentially exposing themselves to additional dangers, including sexual violence from American GIs). She recalled being able to get off work half an hour earlier if she was on her period, and generally spoke of it as if it was difficult, but not particularly traumatising. By contrast, Lan – another Youth Shock Brigades member – perceived it as extremely hard, describing the hardships in great detail:

> We didn't have sanitary pads like now – we had to take the mosquito nets. After one cycle of menstruation was over, we washed it and used it for the next one – for the whole year. It was thick and tough, and we didn't have any soap. We would wait for rain and leave the 'pad' under it, so that the acid goes into the 'pad' and 'washes' it. Or we peed on it, and let it soak.

She further described sometimes going into forest, picking fruit and specific types of nuts and using them as a soap. Lan explicitly said that female hardships were bigger than males. They were only distributed 2 uniforms a year. During sunny days, washing and drying them was easy; however, during rainy season, the girls had to wear wet clothes. The girls' hair was always full of lice. She recalled having difficulties adjusting to the rough material of the uniform; the girls' nipples were sore red, while their genitals, constantly rubbing the rough material of the trousers, were 'completely black' and were in constant pain.

These differences could be due to each girls' individual interpretation and understanding of events. It can also be traced to the girls' social and geographical context. Xuan was working mainly in the North of Vietnam, where the conditions were poor, but still allowed for access to water and basic sanitary products. By contrast, Lan worked in the South, where the fighting was much more intense. Indeed, when I asked Xuan whether she had problems with access to water, she mentioned that her circumstances were still better than that of Central or Southern Vietnam,

where lack of water is very well-known. This highlights, therefore, the extent to which the experience of child soldiers cannot be conceptualised as uniform, as even female-specific hardships varied based on the girls' own interpretations and circumstances.

One theme which surfaced in my interviews was the importance of specifically female spaces to bond and cope with the wars. While all interviewees mentioned camaraderie as a major source of their coping mechanisms, it was women who told me two specific instances when friendship with other girls helped them overcome the physical and emotional hardships of war. The first was Lan, who joined the Youth Shock Brigades right before Lunar New Year, which is traditionally a family holiday in Vietnam. She remembered missing home 'horribly' at first, hiding in the bush to cry. Another woman heard her crying, but 'consoled and encouraged' her. As Lan recounted: 'She said, I will take you as my sister. And I calmed down, I didn't cry anymore'. The second story was retold by Tien, another former Youth Shock Brigades member, who fell sick with fever one day while carrying out a mission. At three or four in the morning, the unit left for work, while she lay in a tunnel. She remembered hearing no human voices, only wind and birds' singing, and thinking to herself that she was going to die soon. One of her male comrades later went to check whether she 'was dead or alive' and asked a female comrade to feed her some milk. The female comrade then asked guerrillas for milk because Youth Shock Brigades did not have any, and suggested she feeds Tien. She proceeded to care for Tien, telling her that she was alive and making sure she rested, as well as helping her to wash her clothes. The rest of the unit did not go into the tunnel, afraid that Tien's sickness might be contagious. The woman, then, exposed herself to more danger by caring for her comrade.

It is important to note that women in Vietnamese culture are expected to take on a role of caregivers, providing comfort and their own resources to others (Rydstrøm, 2002). Compassion and self-sacrifice (such as being the only person to care for a potentially contagious comrade) was generally expected of them; it is thus not surprising that girls displayed such qualities and volunteered to perform these roles. However, no male interviewees reported similar specific instances of a female friend or caretaker helping them get through a difficult physical or emotional situation, even though instances of women's emotional labour which 'makes wars work' has been recorded by other researchers (Howell, 2015, p. 141). There seems to have been, then, space for female-centric bonding, which left a deep impression on the girls. In line with Green's (2010) arguments that women's friendship can be a major source of empowerment, these instances demonstrate how within circumstances that neglected women's physical and emotional suffering, girls made space to support each other and refuse passive suffering.

6.5. Children's navigation of social context

6.5.1 Habitus and change

In the previous sections, I have outlined the new environment which children found themselves in. It consisted of various new aspects that children had to familiarise themselves with: new jobs which required new skills and physical endurance; new information to be learned about patriotism, communism, and guerrilla conduct; as well as new place within the hierarchy of guerrilla social relations. In this section, I will use Bourdieu's thinking tools to trace the ways in which children internalised and navigated the new environment they were exposed to.

Firstly, as I have described in Chapter 2, Bourdieu conceptualised habitus as durable, but also flexible and open to change. However, habitus is also conceptualised to be 'structuring structure' (Lau, 2004, p. 377), in a sense that it produces actors who internalise the new practices to the extent that they end up reproducing and reinforcing the same structures. This was a prominent theme in my interviews: education and training by guerrillas have added a layer of socialisation to my interviewees in addition to previous socialisations by their friends and family. As children got more familiar with their new social context, they started actively perpetuating and reinforcing the principles of patriotism and unity to guide them through guerrilla life and job completion. In doing so, they creatively and enthusiastically reinforced the same practices they had previously adopted. For many children, this change allowed for an easier adaption into guerrilla life. By memorising the codes of conduct and communist principles well (as well as actively perpetuating them), they maintained their status as a respected member of the Viet Cong, and avoided critique in criticism sessions, thus also gaining more symbolic (honour, respect) and social capital (making friends and cultivating social relationships).

This is not to say that the new structures were internalised by my interviewees passively. Indeed, previous research has shown that children rarely accept change without firstly reflecting on how this change might fit into their existing worldview (Winther-Lindqvist, 2009). This was also a prominent theme in my interviews: my interviewees, while clearly memorising and internalising the communist propaganda and lessons, infused the new understanding of the world with their own existing thoughts on what is right, what is desirable, and what is possible. Going further, my interviewees indicated that with time, they have internalised new rules to the extent that they mastered them and knew subconsciously when they could break them without having to face any

criticism. This indicates that children became familiar enough with their new life – or, as Bourdieu (1990, p. 66) would call it, gained enough 'feel for the game' – to be able to anticipate how others might react to their breaking rules; whether they would be punished or ignored. The following sections elaborate more on these findings, ultimately showing how children learned to navigate, bypass, and reinforce the social practices they learned while participating in the military struggle.

6.5.2 Reinforcing social practices

As I have noted earlier, children do not just internalise new social practices, but also reinforce them, often enthusiastically and creatively. Uncovering these experiences can be particularly useful when investigating children's agency not manifested as rebellion or resistance, but rather as willingly *engaging* in social practices of the surrounding context. This, once again, echoes a point made by Madsen (2012) that in Confucian societies, agency can be understood not as defiance and disobedience, but as being dedicated to one's prescribed role.

This seemed to be the case for the Viet Cong child soldiers. For example, many willingly reinforced the propaganda messages given to them by cadres, creatively coming up with their own ways to assert the importance of patriotism and fighting in guerrillas' lives. One example is the use of songs and dances, which, as we have seen before, have been used as a tool to raise the fighters' morale and cultivate patriotism. There is also evidence that children did not simply internalise these songs, but also participated in creating them. Phong, for example, recited one song he wrote as a 13-year old cadet, called 'Age of childhood/youth'. Much like the songs we have seen in section 2 of this chapter, this song also highlights the unity of the guerrilla groups, optimism, and determination to train to become a 'good' guerrilla:

> Holding hands, we sing together
> So much happiness, harmonious with the sun
> We are the youngsters, with so much rhythm in life
> We sing so tomorrow flowers bloom
> I am determined to train myself
> So tomorrow, when I become an adult
> I become a member of the Union.

While not writing her own songs, Hong similarly used singing as a way to help her comrades: 'You know, back then, bombs burned people – they couldn't open their eyes. So, one soldier from the Tay ethnic minority, we had to feed him by spoon bit by bit. He requested specifically for me to serve him. Because other people, sometimes they would spoonfeed him too much, he wouldn't be able to eat it, he would cry. So I fed him every day like this'. She then decided to sing for him because he couldn't open his eyes or his mouth, but he could hear her sing. Other people 'who were conscious', could hear her sing and told her 'they were very happy, they didn't feel the pain anymore'.

Hong's case also provides an illustration of the complexities of children's internal thought processes. On the one hand, she mentioned that she wanted to do everything she could 'for citizens, for our country', echoing some of the slogans guerrillas used in their propaganda. However, she spent much longer elaborating to me how she became determined to work harder after her own encounters with people she treated as a nurse:

> There were people who injured their eyes, their legs… their whole bodies were burnt. It was very tragic. I saw people like this, and I was already sad, but then, there was a smell. It smelled so bad! If it was normal life, I wouldn't be able to tolerate it […] They lay on two beds, and their faces were completely burnt. The doctor washed them, but then maggots crawled all over the place. That's how rotten the injuries were.

She remembered pitying the injured guerrillas so much that she cried over their pain and injuries. It is her compassion which motivated her to work harder. As she articulated: 'But I felt empathy for these soldiers – they lost their life for peace. I thought – those people lost their lives for the country, for us – we would have to do everything to help them, too'. The idea of soldiers losing their lives 'for peace', or 'for the country', in itself, is indicative of the guerrilla propaganda. However, the subsequent justifications for her work came through applying guerrilla principles to what she witnessed herself. Hong's activities, then, were underpinned by a complicated combination of her own emotions of empathy and pity, her experience and external socialisation.

Beyond singing, children also displayed willingness to work as hard as they could. We have seen in the previous chapter that My, after being exposed to propaganda performances, decided to join the Viet Cong as a nurse. While living with guerrillas, she worked hard to become the best nurse in her medical base; eventually, as she recounted, the doctor always requested she assist

with his surgeries, while scolding some of older nurses for not doing their job properly. Vinh, who was tasked with maintaining a camp for political cadres, including Vietnamese and Laotian, described always striving to do his job honestly. For example, when given a budget, he always bought exactly the amount that was needed for the camp. He did not, as many others during the war, buy excess products such as cigarettes or coffee, and sell them on the black market. For him, it was a matter of principle: he decided to carry out his job in the best way possible. Because the cadres trusted him, after a few years he became the kitchen manager of the camp. He was 21 at the time, managing people who were older than him.

Even in situations when their lives were threatened, some of my interviewees managed to come up with creative solutions. It is also strikingly portrayed in Loan's story, a sapper who mainly operated in Southern and Central Vietnam. After witnessing her father – a communist – being beaten up by the GVN officials, she became determined to participate in the struggle. Starting from helping her mother to cook food and shelter guerrillas, she later started working for guerrillas herself as a sapper. In 1965, at 14 years old, she was almost captured by the Southern officials. As they were chasing her, she had no way of escaping to a secret tunnel, nor could she contact other political cadres for help. In these circumstances, she came up with a plan: to wear her shirt inside out and knock on a villagers' door. She then remembered:

> I knocked on this woman's door and asked her to let me in. She said – it's four in the morning, why are you running into my house? I then explained that I was carrying out my mission and the GVN were chasing me. I asked her to pretend to be my aunt. She immediately said – come in, come in. After a while, the Southern officials came in. I said – I am a normal villager, my foot is crippled and I am going up to Saigon to get treatment.

She then described pretending to crawl as if her foot was crippled. Her creative solution to the problem notwithstanding, it is her internal thoughts that portray how she felt superior and smarter than the adult who chased her. She described thinking to herself: 'That American was so stupid – if I am crippled, my foot should look small. But my foot was fine, and he still believed me'. In this instance, then, she demonstrated not only the ability to think quickly and resolve situations in a creative way under highly stressful circumstances, but also assessment of how this situation should have been responded to by other people (in this case, the soldier).

6.5.3 Gaining the 'feel for the game' – learning when rules could be bypassed

The previous sections show that children clearly understood and respected the guerrilla's work and propaganda. Earlier responses by my interviewees also indicate that they respected the discipline and obeyed the guerrillas' rules. However, Alcock (2007, p. 281) observed that children also willingly engage in 'playing flexibly with the rules that surround everyday practices', suggesting that children do not always blindly follow orders. My findings also indicate that while engaging with guerrillas' code of conduct and work discipline, children also eventually learned to subconsciously sense which rules they could negotiate.

This is reflected in Tien's anecdote: when she and her friends in Youth Shock Brigades group kept chatting and joking around during work, the frustrated unit commander ordered them to stop talking, shouting: 'You fucking sluts, chatterboxes!' Given the strict hierarchy in the Viet Cong, obedience to commander's orders would be expected. At this point, however, the group was already familiar enough with the commander to know that even when using such harsh language, he is unlikely to punish them for chatting; his comment, in fact, only made them laugh harder. Tien mentioned that it is still a very 'dear memory' for the veterans in her unit. In study sessions, they would quietly tie pieces of paper to someone's shirt, and laughed at the way it moved, again showing their willingness to ignore rules in supposedly strict classes. In another instance, Phong remembered that the children in his cadet school were so frustrated by the lack of food that they tied up the 'older brother' cook and threw him in the river. The choice of placing their frustrations on the cook is noteworthy – they knew that he was less likely to punish them than teachers. However, they then realised that if the cook is tied up, there will be no food at all. As a result, they promised not to touch him – imposing their own rules on their everyday life – and vented their frustrations onto teachers instead.

Sometimes children's strategies to achieve their goals involved stealing the villagers' fruit and leaves, which was not in line with the rules of guerrillas' proper behaviour. Xuan remembered pretending to go and do something in the villagers' houses but, in reality, going there to steal cassava leaves to grow in their own units. Cuong, a member of regular forces marching through the jungle, remembered a particularly elaborate scheme to prank senior commanders to get access to food. He remembered that each unit often had square pies wrapped in banana leaves. They were not allowed to eat them until given permission; unit commanders often conducted random checks, touching the wraps to make sure that the pies are still there. The children, then,

often ate the pies and replaced them with square-shaped pieces of wood; the commanders touched them, felt the consistency of the wood being similar to the pie, and would not question them any further.

Earlier in this chapter, I described the ways in which political cadres worked to maintain morale of their units. However, accounts from my interviewees also suggest that they cultivated a sense of optimism for themselves in what Jeffrey (2011, p. 250) called a distinctly childlike way: with fun, jokes, and playful mischief. Similarly, Tien said that 'younger Youth Shock Brigade members always had something to laugh about, unlike older ones'. The importance of laughing and joking was repeatedly stated to be an important coping mechanism for my interviewees – for example, Quan articulated that 'if it wasn't for the optimism and fun, I wouldn't be able to tolerate it'. What is notable, however, is the ways in which their jokes deliberately poked fun at their circumstances and rules surrounding guerrilla life. For example, Xuan remembered that the Youth Shock Brigades members 'found everything funny. Every time we heard bombs, we would laugh while running to the tunnels; by the time we stopped laughing, the bombing would be over'. One of the 'funny' things was the ways in which the bombings disrupted rules about relationships: 'During work, boys and girls were not allowed to be in relationships, but when running to the tunnels, they would hold hands or jump into each other's laps. We did it spontaneously, without thinking, and then discover it once we're in the tunnel. Everyone found it very funny, so we would laugh at that'. Other children, knowing that they could not escape the harsh living conditions, nor could they necessarily complain directly to their superiors, started to come up with parody songs, making fun of their circumstances. For example, while not done directly by my interviewee, Phong remembered that one cadet changed a song 'Healthy for the Fatherland' to 'Getting rashes for the Fatherland', reflecting the poor hygienic conditions in the jungle. Sometimes, they broke the rules by quietly singing the parodied lyrics during the times when propaganda songs were playing to uplift the cadets' morale.

6.5.4 Utilising American expectations of childhood

So far, I have described children's lives and positions within the Viet Cong, and how children navigated and negotiated social practices within the group. Beyond the guerrilla group, however, many of my interviewees interacted with American forces, which also constituted a part of their social environment. In this section, I will look more closely at how children found ways to exercise

competence and creativity when carrying out their missions. In doing so, they not only used their own skills and knowledge, but also their social awareness about what the American soldiers were like and how they were likely to react to children's actions.

A prominent example of this is the resourceful ways in which children used their own childhood to carry out their missions. Documents and photos from the war show that American GIs generally approached children as subjects of protection, rather than as a threat. This is indicated, for example, by a photo published by *Time.* It shows an American GI taking care of a child (Picture 3). The commentary describes how in doing so, 'hard Marines suddenly became the most gentle, loving persons' (Gabriner & Rothman, n.d.). In another instance, Stur (2011, p. 154) describes a pamphlet with the following description: 'battle-scarred hands of a Marine infantryman […] giving a little girl – destined by the fate of guerrilla warfare to spend her youth in an orphanage – her first real doll'.

Picture 4 U.S. corpsman carrying an injured child away from the battle in Hue. McCullin, n.d.

In some cases, children's age saved their lives without children deliberately using their age to protect themselves. Tam, carrying out her missions of transporting weapons for the Viet Cong, described being caught by the GVN forces during one of their missions. Two of her comrades died in the attack; only her and the unit commander were left. She remembered making her way

to a bakery, where the commander told her to hide in the oven while he distracts them – in reality, he probably accepted that he was going to die. Eventually, however, she was captured. The GVN soldiers were almost prepared to shoot her, until one of them said: 'Look, she's so small. She probably tagged along for fun without knowing anything… what Viet Cong? What's the use of killing her?' They did not know that out of all of my interviewees, she articulated most explicitly political motivations from the very beginning, joining the war because she found the Saigon regime too exploitative. She was then tried in court and sent to various prisons – however, she was also the only person in the unit who survived the attack.

Other children, however, deliberately used their childhood and exploit the belief that their age (in American eyes) presupposed ignorance, innocence, and vulnerability. As such, children were effective in doing tasks while remaining unsuspicious, particularly in keeping watch, delivering documents, or running small errands for the guerrillas. One of my interviewees, Linh, started working as a messenger from 10 years old, later participating in larger-scale guerrilla operations. When she started, she sewed a small pocket inside her underwear where she hid important documents. Sometimes, American officials would suspect that she was doing delivery and search her; however, they never made her take off her underwear because she was a child, so she was never caught. She remembered, however, that adults would be requested to take off their underwear during these searches. Knowing that American soldiers tended to check children less thoroughly, she was more eager to carry out guerrilla activities and help the Viet Cong.

As we have also seen in Stur's (2011) descriptions of a pamphlet where a soldier giving a doll to a small girl was portrayed as an important act of humanity, play was considered an inseparable part of childhood by most adults surrounding children, including the American staff and the GVN. This assumption was also exploited by children working for the guerrillas to steal the American supplies. Their jobs were important to the guerrillas, who were underequipped and found much of their supplies by stealing it from the enemy or taking it from dead bodies (Tanham, 2006). Hung, for example, recounted not being afraid of American soldiers because he knew they liked children – as he stated: 'Just say 'hello', 'ok' to them, they liked it very much'. The soldiers were very willing to play with him, and frequently offered him fruit and chocolates. Sometimes he would specifically ask for American coffee or chocolates to bring it to the communist cadres. After playing with them for a bit, he would make sure that they trusted him and would suggest to massage them in order to be able to go inside their bases, which had piles of grenades in the corners. He remembered having to massage them very carefully, 'so that they are really happy' and distracted.

While doing so, he simultaneously used a thin string, frequently used by Vietnamese peasants, to hook grenades and drag them quietly towards himself, then hiding it. Sometimes children would work in pairs or in threes – one, for example, would be massaging or playing with the soldiers, while others stole the supplies.

On another occasion, Hung was asked to make special 'baskets' out of banana leaves and cover mines that Viet Cong planted along roads. Since the GVN often scanned the roads for mines, these leaves would intercept the metal detectors' signal and keep the mines undiscovered. Hung remembered that collecting large amounts of banana leaves could lead to suspicions. Every time a GVN official asked him: 'What are you doing, child, collecting these leaves?', he would say: 'I'm making a gun out of the leaves!', and then pretended to shoot a gun. 'You know, since I was a child, children are mischievous'. He was careful to pretend to play when in sight of other people, but in fact collected leaves, dried them, and covered mines with it. In these examples, we see that children's intelligence went beyond the immediate ability to steal grenades or deliver messages. It was underpinned by very high levels of social awareness: the ability to predict adults' expectations, the cultural meanings attached to their childhood, and how to exploit these effectively to achieve their own goals.

Ultimately, it is perhaps the creativity and autonomy which children were free to exercise, that resulted in many of them enjoying their time with the guerrillas. My interviewees were growing up within a dangerous and violent environment; however, many saw it as a way to learn to navigate highly restrictive structures creatively and learn to survive even within some of the most challenging circumstances. For many children, learning new things and consistently accomplishing new results, was a very rewarding experience. It was not rare for my interviewees to remember being very proud when they managed to come up with creative solutions that would be challenging even for adults. Many of them, such as My and Vinh, treated their guerrilla work as a job, stating that the opportunity to exercise creativity and hone their skills through training and real-life experience eventually shaped them as workers and as people.

6.6. Conclusion

Accounts of my interviewees demonstrate that their experience was far from homogenous. Their experience was shaped by different factors, including the specific jobs they were required

to carry out and where they were located geographically. In addition, children's experience was inevitably shaped by guerrillas' hierarchy, where children were generally in positions of subordination. It is notable, however, that their childhood did not necessitate presumptions of inherent vulnerability or additional guidance from adults.

Much like their motivations to take up arms, the child soldiers' activities alongside guerrillas is best understood as an interaction between objective structures and children's own internal lives. Children internalised many messages they received from the guerrillas about patriotism, liberation movement, and proper guerrilla conduct. However, children rarely adopted them without questioning: sometimes they ignored the rules, and sometimes they reinforced them. In some instances, they internalised part of the guerrillas' teachings, and combined it with their own observations as they gained more experience as guerrillas. Their lives and subsequent courses of action – whether they were striving to be the best nurse in the medical base, or distracting Americans while stealing grenades – were always underpinned by the attitudes and beliefs they developed as a result of their own internal thoughts, as well as external socialisation.

Throughout their stories, my interviewees demonstrated a close awareness of the people around them, thus again highlighting that analysis of children cannot separate them from their social environment. Indeed, their ability to cultivate relationships with their peers and villagers or predict reactions from different adults became one of the defining features of their experience. Their environment provided a sense of camaraderie, humour, and play, as well as becoming a space for mutual learning and teaching, emotional bonding, and empathy. Paying attention to instances when children demonstrated competence, empathy, and dedication to their work, in turn, challenges the stereotype of a passive, dehumanised child soldier. These instances are particularly worthy of emphasis because they underline that while working with guerrillas, people I interviewed never lost their humanity, but actively sought to cultivate it.

With regards to their work, children displayed an impressive awareness of how they could use their childhood to achieve their own ends. As analysed by Khalili (2011), counterinsurgency groups often treat women and children as undifferentiated victims, whereas men are automatically presumed to be combatants. However, these also made children less suspicious and thus effective and important members of the guerrilla group. Not all of their jobs required using their childhood to achieve their goals; children also carried out tasks equal to their adult comrades. In these cases, children, too, had to solve problems creatively and often without any guidance. As

we will see in the next chapter, the guerrilla habitus, internalised messages about patriotism, guerrillas' work discipline and endurance of hardships had become a very important part of child soldiers' identities. Rather than forgetting or discarding it, my interviewees viewed it as a distinct period in their lives – as important and worthy of respect as other periods.

Chapter 7: Reintegration of child soldiers in post-war Vietnam

7.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how my interviewees internalised many practices of guerrilla groups – starting from political orientation, behavioural conduct, and the importance of camaraderie. After completing their mission at the end of both wars, former child soldiers I interviewed found themselves in the middle of political and economic turmoil and having to navigate an unstable environment, while building their civilian lives. For example, My – now a 19-year-old woman – had returned to her village at the outskirts of Saigon and had to return to school and continue studying. Si, who worked as a part of the main forces, stayed for a few months to manage a few villages with the rest of the guerrilla units, before returning to the North. Tien, having just turned 18 years old, remembered having absolutely no idea where her life would go from there, what occupation she would later study for, and how she would achieve it. Many of my interviewees found their villages burned and their fields destroyed.

Yet, the general trend of my interviews revealed that their transition from war to post-war life was a relatively seamless one. I will argue that this was facilitated by several factors. The first is the environment within which they were operating – they were the victors of the war, thus their starting point was one of privilege, especially in comparison to their counterparts who fought for the defeated GVN. In turn, they were given opportunities for employment and the community did not stigmatise their war experience. This is not to say that they found reintegration an easy endeavour – as we will see below, they found some difficulties in their lives, most notably the discrepancy between what they expected and their realities. Their adaptation was then further facilitated by the second factor, which is the habitus acquired through the children's time as guerrillas. It proved to be particularly useful in the context where the government was implementing socialist policies which guerrillas were already familiar with.

The accounts of my interviewees stand in contrast to the accounts of child soldiers who struggled to reintegrate, and found significant challenges in socialisation, employment, education, and generally going back to daily civilian tasks. While these cases are common, they are linked to the specific social contexts within which this reintegration takes place – often these child soldiers fought in a group which had no opportunities to implement their own support structure and gain privilege in the community. This section, by contrast, explores what happens when child

soldiers are reintegrated into their community as victors, and when they are allowed access to institutional support, social privilege, and space to preserve – rather than discard – their past.

7.2. Post-war context

7.2.1 Vietnam after war

Before explaining employment policies and the communities' attitudes towards former young guerrillas, I will explain the general post-war environment in Vietnam after the military conflict. By the end of the war with the US, Vietnam was left in a crisis. Two-thirds of villages, agricultural land, roads, and railways were destroyed by bombs, with many more mines still unexploded (Dang, 2010). Agent Orange, used by the US forces as a chemical weapon, further left many people and livestock permanently mutilated. The US refused to provide any reconstruction aid; on the contrary, it imposed a long 19-year-long embargo on Vietnam, prohibiting any US businesses to import or export any goods (Castelli, 1995). It further pressured its allies and other international institutions to follow suit (Davies, 2015). Overall, as Bradley (2020) noted, Vietnam was left largely on its own to deal with economic and social problems.

   In the next decade, Vietnam ran on centrally planned economy. It has to be noted that this economic model had already been implemented in the North after the Viet Minh's victory against the French forces in 1954. After both sides signed the Geneva Accords and agreed to a ceasefire, the communist government headed North Vietnam, and a US-backed non-communist regime remained in the South. The leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP) focused on developing the socialist economy in the North. This resulted in a range of policies, e.g., reallocating land to peasants, introducing collective farming and cooperatives, and running a variety of literacy and educational programmes (Kerkvliet, 2018). They pointed to many reasons to justify the change: for example, peasants would be able to use land more efficiently, raise more livestock, produce beyond their needs and 'strongly encourage our peasant compatriots in the south to exert every effort in the struggle against the United States and Diem in order to push ahead for reunification of our homeland' (Kerkvliet, 2018, p. 10). In sum, the shift was articulated both as a way to better economic life for everyone, as well as an act of patriotism. Kerkvliet (2018) noted that peasants were grateful for these reforms as they believed they were still effective in improving their economic situation. In addition, due to the government's programs, the North had a better rate of literacy, education, and female political participation compared to the South (Grosse, 2015).

More than 20 years later, after the American forces withdrew, the same economic institutions were introduced to the South. Yet, while the socialist economic model had run relatively well in the North, many Southern peasants refused to accept implementation of these institutions (Kolko, 2007). Thrift (1987, p. 424), for example, recorded how peasants in the Red River Delta 'refused to harvest crops, abandoned land, even clandestinely killed their livestock to avoid taxes'. Some of my Southern interviewees recalled the disincentive and disinterest with which farmers participated in co-ops – for example, immediately tossing their hoes as soon as they heard the end-of-the-day gong, often leaving their work still unfinished. The government, however, forced the peasants to continue working in the co-ops. Hung, who ran small errands for guerrillas in the South, recalled that some children could be denied education if their family refused to participate in collective agricultural organisations. In these circumstances, many Southern civilians chose to flee – even those who did not initially support the GVN. This, in turn, created waves of refugees in the South, as well as general social tensions between those who supported communism and those who did not. Some of my interviewees also remembered an increase in presence of small armed groups which remained loyal to the old regime and harassed villages for food and produce instead of joining the co-ops. The economic hardships were also further complicated by other wars which followed immediately – Vietnam invaded Cambodia and entered a war with China.

In turn, this had meant that the outputs suffered from underperforming. The next years were characterised by a collapsing economy and widespread poverty. While the government predicted a 14% increase of the economy following 1975, in reality it only grew by 0.4%; the industry grew by 0.6% and agriculture by 1.9% (Nguyen, 2012). The poverty rate of the country stood at 60% (Davies, 2015). Inexperience in economic management and lack of incentives was among the primary reasons for the economic crisis Vietnam experienced in the 1970s (Harvie and Tran, 1997). Corruption and nepotism also took place in the socialist government, as was particularly closely analysed by Kolko (2007). According to this analysis, being a Party member in war time did not come with many privileges, and many VCP members continued to live like peasants. However, after the unification, being a child of a Party member gave them privileges in terms of education and work, thus 'their loyalties were increasingly to a system that rewarded them personally rather than to the ideology that had motivated their parents' (Kolko, 2007, p. 11). This was also recognised in the South after the Viet Cong victory, where many people who entered the Party were 'outright opportunists' (Kolko, 2007, p. 11). In turn, it increased the faults of the Party, which has been acknowledged both by the Party leaders as well as my own interviewees. As Kolko noted, many former Vietnamese revolutionaries, in the end, asked whether their sacrifice was worth winning the war, but losing at peace.

It is within these economic and social contexts that my interviewees started to reintegrate with civilian lives. However, despite the economic and social hardships, their return to civilian life was characterised by relative calmness. The next sections will analyse more closely the factors that contributed to their seamless transition. Before analysing the child soldiers' habitus and its role in helping children reintegrate, three characteristics specific to their social context need to be acknowledged. Firstly, my interviewees enjoyed much privilege due to being the victors of the war. Secondly, the socialist state provided everyone with a job – being former revolutionaries, my interviewees were also privileged in terms of access to employment and education, while those working for the GVN, as we will see below, were forced to work in re-education camps and perform manual labour. Secondly, the former child soldiers I interviewed remained largely present in their communities, resulting in their deep understanding and connection to peasantry and village life. The next sections explain these factors in more detail.

7.2.2 Privilege of communism supporters

This section will explore the first factor specific to the social context of my interviewees, which affected their experience of reintegration: their position of privilege as victors of the war. Not only had they won, the rebellion became the government and thus had the opportunity to implement a range of programmes and spend time and resources on stabilising the political and social situation. The communist supporters' position of privilege relative to the GVN supporters in the aftermath of the war is worth exploring, as it directly impacted the experience of reintegration of my interviewees. It is unclear whether the GVN deployed child soldiers; however, research below suggests that regardless of their age, the GVN supporters would be subjected to much discrimination and marginalisation from both the government policies and local communities.

Firstly, many GVN soldiers and supporters were sent to oppressive re-education camps in the aftermath of the war – 'bamboo gulags' (Nguyen, 1983). There, they would suffer through political indoctrination, hard labour, and isolation from their families. They would frequently be told that the re-education camp would last for several days, while in reality, they would be kept there for years. Once out, they would still continue experiencing stigma for belonging to the defeated 'puppet army' (Nguyen, 2016). Prior to the defeat, they would enjoy some service and welfare benefits established by the GVN specifically for its army (military hospitals, allocated housing, special schools for children) – however, once the Southern government fell, so did the institutions (Tran, 2016). The Southern veterans immediately lost their status, and financial and social benefits, left

to navigate their lives not only in political and economic turmoil, but also in conditions where they were actively discriminated against.

Economic and social welfare was not the only benefit lost by the GVN veterans. There are further recorded instances of veterans being evicted from their homes, only having temporary residence in their own houses, or having their houses burned and destroyed (Nguyen, 2016; Pham & Tran, n.d). They further faced discrimination in education and employment, unable to find jobs due to their 'bad background' and only being able to perform hard labour (sometimes not being able to acquire even these jobs). Tran (2016, p. 37) cites a translated excerpt from *Tattered Lives,* a collection of short first-hand accounts written by veterans working for the GVN, which demonstrates the extent of their economic and social marginalisation in particular detail:

> In places outside Saigon, the communists have confiscated houses once built by the South Vietnamese government to compensate disabled veterans. In My Thoi village, disabled veterans had 24 hours to vacate their homes. With nowhere to go, many went to Saigon, where they live on the streets, sleep in train stations, at bus stops, in market stalls, and in abandoned cemeteries… We organize ourselves into small groups and obtain incense sticks from the local temples to resell them on street corners and in alleys… There are many gravely disabled veterans who could not even sell incense. They have to beg on the streets.

In a Confucian society, an individual rarely carries shame and stigma alone – it is thus not surprising that once someone was found to be a GVN supporter or a soldier, their children, parents, and family were also affected. For example, a GVN veteran in Nguyen's (2016) study remembered that her children also experienced discrimination, denounced as children of traitors, puppets, and collaborators to imperialism. Like their family members, the children were also denied education and employment opportunities. This, in turn, forced some veterans to distance themselves from their parents and children in order to minimise their hardships and discrimination – being isolated and marginalised even further. Interviews with Nguyen (2016) suggest that this discrimination had lasted for a decade after the end of the war into the late 1980s.

Overall, Southern veterans, unlike their communist counterparts, were 'ghosts of the war – unseen, unheard, and unacknowledged by the Vietnamese government', almost rendered as non-existent in the Vietnamese social and economic landscape and history (Nguyen, 2016, p. 142). The Vietnamese state refused to recognise their existence, denying them any benefits to help

them settle in post-war life – education, employment, pension, etc. This is to be contrasted with the range of programmes implemented for the guerrilla veterans, which caused tensions between those who supported communism and those who supported the GVN, which will be discussed later throughout the chapter.

The privilege of the former communist guerrillas compared to the GVN veterans is important to acknowledge because it contrasts with the majority of cases of contemporary child soldiering. In cases such as the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, Union of Congolese Patriots in Congo or FARC in Colombia, the groups did not have the opportunity or interest in establishing formal institutions to support their fighters (Thompson, 2020; Borzello, 2007; Smith, 2012). In addition, they frequently belong to the side that lost the political struggles, which then had meant that the children fighting for them had to face the stigma of the defeated group, similar to what the GVN veterans were exposed to. In cases where children did fight for a group which eventually established their own government, most accounts, once again, focus on the children's victimisation and human rights abuses amidst the political chaos and weak government structure. For example, Mekonnen (2012) and Binadi and Binadi, (2011) describe the circumstances in Eritrea and South Sudan accordingly: even despite winning, the governments have weak records of reinstating reintegration programmes for child soldiers (and ex-fighters more generally). However, in the case of my interviewees, it is their privilege and status as the winning group which facilitated access to institutional support and community acceptance to the extent that many child soldiers across the world – including those who worked for the GVN, if there were any – did not. In turn, it was one of the significant factors which facilitated the relatively seamless transition to their post-war life. In light of this privilege, other factors – economic opportunities and the perception of children – are analysed next.

7.2.3 Economic opportunities for former revolutionaries

The Communist Party started to implement the socialist regime in the North after the Geneva Accords were signed, and extended them to the South after the Viet Cong victory. As a result of socialist policies, the local and national government authorities organised and managed labour, assigning jobs to all citizens fit to work in various state offices and co-ops to fulfil labour quotas. This is highlighted in regulations such as: 'All levels of the government are responsible for arranging suitable jobs for all working people in their localities, enabling them to both have a source of livelihood and contribute to society' (Ministry of Public Security – Ministry of Labour, 1974; my translation). The regulations reveal tight national and regional control over employment: the state kept records of who was or was not unemployed, who had the capacity to move to

another location and who had to work in their own village, different health conditions, etc. Local government branches were required to send this information to the Ministry of Labour regularly, so that it could 'coordinate with the production sectors to arrange and assign jobs' (Council of Ministers, 1974; my translation). The same regulation stated that there are still many unemployed people in the country, despite many jobs being available in the regional branches. Unemployed people were subject to investigation and could be forced to work by the police if needed, as indicated in the Ministry of Labour (1972).

Within these circumstances, finding a source of income, whether by working in an agricultural co-op, or in a local state office, was a realistic possibility for youth. Most (around 97%, according to Luong, 2003) Vietnamese peasants, including youth, joined cooperatives. The VCP also passed several regulations that prioritised veterans and former revolutionaries in finding employment. In a separate directive issued in 1980, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Labour were asked to arrange recruits who left the army to high schools or vocational schools, coordinating it with the training and recruitment targets (Prime Minister, 1980). The Ministry of Defence was to provide exact statistics of soldiers leaving the army, so that other government departments could 'arrange allocation according to recruitment and enrolment demands of branches and localities' (Prime Minister, 1980; my translation). The regulation pointed out that demand still existed for cadres in industries such as accounting, taxes, finances, nursing, among other fields, and asked the Ministry of Labour to instruct provinces to prioritise recruitment among those who have recently left ranks. Various secondary sources confirm that the authority posts in communes or provinces were quickly filled by former revolutionaries. For example, Malarney (2002, p. 77) noted that 'The experience of having served in the military, for many, has become an important qualification for assuming leadership roles in the commune'. Special schools were opened for former revolutionaries, who would be educated and go back to carry out roles of authority in their home provinces (Dang, 2018; as also seen in the Prime Minister's decision in 1980). In an interview with Luong (2003), a villager says that he was drafted (rather than applied) to head a cooperative, suggesting that the government played a major role in controlling job assignment.

Most of my interviewees acknowledged that there indeed existed a separate priority system for former veterans (regardless of their age). The priority systems varied. The most common was to hand a certificate confirming one's completion of military mission, which former guerrillas could present at various factories or offices (Vu, 2020). Much like many former revolutionaries, Minh, who was initially a part of the main forces, was asked to work and rebuild his Northern province

after the war ended. He used the word 'manage' to describe his activities: identifying what buildings needed to be restored, what materials were left and how they could be used, among other jobs. He explained that big military teams would do similar management for bigger cities, while local teams would manage smaller towns and provinces. Another interviewee got a job as a deputy village officer and confirmed that returning soldiers were prioritised in job allocation. For those entering higher education, their military background allowed them extra points which would give them an advantage to achieve the required grade for passing entrance exams. A more complicated system of allocation existed for those who wanted to continue working and studying for the military. For example, Quan, whose journey we have seen in Chapter 5, joined the guerrillas at 16 and worked as a sapper, afterwards choosing to continue studying and move up the military ranks. However, as he explained, several factors needed to be considered during such allocation: the number of people with similar career choices, the number of positions available, and whether the commanders felt the candidate was suited to work for such position. In his case, for example, he was judged to be capable enough to study, and was then sent to study at a university; however, due to the number of study places, his initial choice to become an engineer was not fulfilled. Instead, his commanders asked him to transfer to study politics and train as a political officer.

The same arrangements existed for Youth Shock Brigade members. In general, these young people were almost immediately sent to work in service of post-war society, as demonstrated in the Ministry of Finances' regulation (1976), which requested communes arrange work (most often production in local cooperatives) or education for Youth Shock Brigade members. A regulation issued in 1978 mentions that they should be prioritised when being allocated jobs:

> …depending on the requirements of production, work and circumstances of each member, the branches at the central level and the People's Committees of provinces and cities employing Youth Shock Brigades members will prioritise the placement of them to work in economic branches or to enrol in schools and training classes according to the State regulations. (Prime Minister, 1978a; My translation)

My interviews confirmed that finding a job immediately after war service was not a difficult task for Youth Shock Brigade members. For example, Quang's descriptions explain how, as a Youth Shock Brigade member, he could easily reintegrate into society:

> After I came back, I went straight to work. Whatever job I applied to, I was accepted immediately. But if you wanted to work somewhere else [in another province, for example],

they would be able to arrange it. Some people went to work for the national authorities, and whoever couldn't, worked for the province. That's how they managed the life after war […] Back then, Youth Shock Brigades members had a recommendation letter that they could present when asking for a job.

On the other hand, one of my interviewees – Hung – noted that the privileges the veterans enjoyed caused tensions in society. He acknowledged that while these priorities were 'a repayment of gratitude', they were not always beneficial to the economy or the people. Being a child growing up in the South, he witnessed people with good potential and capabilities being denied entry into good universities or denied jobs because they came from families which supported the GVN. He himself was chosen to join police forces because he 'had a good background'; however, he also witnessed many people without a 'good background' wanting to contribute to the rebuilding of the economy, but not given a chance to do so. Instead of being allocated good jobs, then, they were forced to do manual labour. Many people, he remembered, were frustrated and wished that the US came back – and indeed left the country because they could not see a future for themselves or their families in Vietnam. Former GVN supporters were not the only people to suffer from economic hardships – as I will elaborate below, former revolutionaries, too, experienced the negative consequences of the Vietnamese post-war economy. Despite these complications, however, my interviewees were deeply aware that they were in a position of relative privilege, and many acknowledged that they were only able to receive good jobs and financial renumeration due to their background as guerrillas.

7.2.4 Perception of child soldiers in Vietnamese society

The third factor in the social context within which children were reintegrating is the general perception of guerrillas in Vietnamese society. I will explain this issue on several levels: the first will explain the official recognition of the guerrillas. I will then describe the familiarity of the villagers with guerrillas, and thirdly the response of the children's immediate family and neighbours. Overall, it can be concluded that the community perception of guerrillas varied from positive to neutral.

On the official level, young guerrillas were celebrated on the same level as older ones. The sentiments that existed prior to children's recruitment – the idea that guerrillas were carrying out a noble and historic mission – persisted. After the wars ended, the VCP further portrayed the work of former revolutionaries as deserving praise by giving them awards and medals, or financially

supplementing families of injured, perished, or missing fighters. This is indicated in the regulations issued immediately after the Vietnam War. For example, in a 1975 circular, the government urged: 'Now that the war against the US for national salvation has ended successfully, localities need to […] complete commendation [of former veterans]' (Government, 1975; my translation). The circular further continues to state that the localities need to pay special attention to families with soldiers who were injured or who have died. It is notable that direct participation in combat was not necessary to receive awards and medals – for example, one of my interviewees was awarded a medal of bravery for cooking food and sheltering guerrillas. The importance of family is continuously underlined even in these awards. A regulation issued in 1978 is particularly illustrative of the VCP's honouring family as a unit (Prime Minister, 1978b; my translation):

> A condition for parents to be considered [for the reward] and commended is if they agreed and encouraged their children to emancipate themselves from family and participate in the revolution; not commit crimes against the Fatherland, harming the interests of the people and the revolution; not sentenced to imprisonment or probation by the revolutionary government.

Many of my interviewees, while recounting their experience, showed me their medals and awards, explaining how different guerrilla roles would result in different types of awards. Many of these medals were also accompanied by certificates of acknowledgement of their bravery and achievements hanging on the walls in their houses, as a sign of an accomplishment worthy of pride.

On the village level, none of my interviewees reported experiencing the same glorification as on the official level; however, child soldiers were generally accepted by the villagers, and remained present in village life. The image of a child soldier pulled from their life of relative tranquillity and sent away to far locations is not applicable to many of my interviewees. For many of them, delivering messages, cooking food, digging tunnels, harassing local American soldiers, or running small errands could be done directly from one's village. Many children – both in the North and in the South – continued to be 'farmers by day, guerrillas by night', and maintained their activities as villagers such as farming, studying, socialising with their neighbours and friends. For example, one of my interviewees became a part of the local guerrilla group and carried out most of her activities at night. She would work on the fields during the day, have dinner at home, take a shower, then go to guerrilla meetings or carry out her assigned missions. At around 1am, she would come home and go to sleep. Her everyday life, then, was largely undisrupted. Other children such as Duc or Hung, who mostly ran errands and stole guns, grenades, and food from

the Americans, did so alongside their usual chores. For them, again, there was no reintegration – they were already a part of, and never left, their own communities. The return to farm work was also simple: as Vu (2020) pointed out, many guerrillas were already used to it, so coming back was not a problem.

Some of my interviewees, particularly guerrillas from the North marching to the South during the Vietnam War, were required to travel to different locations as parts of their work for the guerrillas; even then, however, they were not completely removed from wider society. As mentioned in previous chapters, Vietnamese guerrilla organisations, being peasant-led movements, made a deliberate effort to understand the villagers' culture and grievances. While the guerrillas did have a strong identity, and spent much time cultivating it among their fighters (as we have seen in the previous chapter), their identity was largely defined against the American forces – not civilians. As articulated by Vu (2020, p. 202; my translation), a former guerrilla himself: 'Soldiers are naturally connected to civilians', suggesting that for him, the bond was unquestionable (he later connects it directly to the 'simple and peaceful life' many guerrillas led post-war). On the contrary, a part of guerrillas' identity was built precisely on the close relationship between villagers and guerrillas, making it an important characteristic which differentiated guerrillas from the 'foreign invaders'. They used pre-existing traditional values for recruitment and mobilisation and worked alongside villagers when possible. Accounts of my interviewees frequently alluded to casually chatting with villagers, learning about their lives, and helping them with small chores such as sweeping, carrying heavy loads, etc. This was encouraged by the guerrillas. Si, an interviewee who participated as part of the main forces, also recalled being trained in interacting with civilians 'to encourage people to do their jobs, to participate in opening a route, lead the guerrillas to a certain place, or if we are hungry, to feed me. That is a way of communicating so that they understand that I am a good man and a soldier'. He explained that quite often, he applied the same techniques in his post-war life to foster relationships with villagers. Vu (2020, p. 60; my translation) echoed the same sentiments, stating that he also used the same skills with his university classmates; his female classmates, in particular, saw him as an 'older brother worthy of respect'. As such, upon their subsequent return, child soldiers perhaps understood the villagers' ways of life more – rather than less – acutely.

We have also seen that the relationship was reciprocal in many instances: it was not rare for villagers to shelter and help the guerrillas, and this was further utilised by the guerrillas through their principle of 'three togethers': sleeping, eating, and working with the villagers. Indeed, it is through this sheltering that some of my interviewees first encountered the Viet Cong. This is the

case of one of my interviewees, Linh, who was sheltered by villagers throughout her time as a young guerrilla. In the previous chapter, I described how she first started delivering documents and helping the Viet Cong navigate around her home village. Later, at the age of 16–17, she started working as a full-time guerrilla – still in her home village. However, the GVN authorities were persecuting her, and it was not safe for her to live in her house. She thus was especially reliant on villagers who hid her from the GVN authorities and provided her with food, drink, and shelter. She recalled a specific GVN official, who was tasked with catching her, offering rewards for those who might turn her in, once even locking a group of villagers in a room and demanding they reveal her location to him. 'But the villagers are very smart, no one told him anything', she remembered. These accounts illustrate that even when not allowed to continue their 'normal life' as farmers, guerrillas – and by extension, child soldiers who worked for them full-time – still maintained close relationships with the villagers. In turn, it meant that the child soldiers were still exposed to the ways of life and relationships with the general population. By the time the war had ended, they still remained integrated in wider social structures, which helped them to reintegrate into post-war society.

While the relationship between my interviewees and the villagers was that of familiarity, my interviewees from the South noted that guerrillas enjoyed relative social prestige in comparison to those who supported the GVN – regardless of whether they were child soldiers or not. For example, Hung observed that if a former GVN supporter voiced concern over discriminatory policies of the VCP, e.g., by barring them from entering universities or working at certain jobs, 'the communist supporters might say – it's not your place to criticise'. Loan, a former sapper from South Vietnam, recalled that after the Vietnam War ended, she often went to village gatherings and noticed some former GVN supporters being reluctant or awkward when speaking to her. However, they also described that the animosity in social interactions depended on each family, and in cases of my interviewees, was not encouraged. Hung, for example, displayed much empathy for the GVN supporters, understanding that 'that's war, so that's normal'. With time, as Loan recalled, both sides started to do business together, marrying each other's children, and got along with each other well.

On the family level, most of my interviewees recalled being welcomed back warmly by their parents and extended families. For example, My, who left her family to serve in Saigon, remembered the relief and happiness with which her family met her. In particular, she remembered that her extended family and immediate neighbours were relieved: 'When they learned that I left for Saigon, they assumed that I went to work for the GVN. They were

disappointed. But when I came back, they were very happy because they realised they were wrong about me and I was a good person', again indicating that as a Viet Cong guerrilla, she enjoyed more social acceptance than those who supported the Southern regime. In another instance, Loan recalled her mother and other villagers preparing a big meal, singing, and celebrating all night.

We can see, then, that there are several factors specific to the social context of my interviewees, which enabled their transition to post-war life. My interviewees, in other words, had access to economic, social, and symbolic capital, which was not available to supporters of the GVN. Former Viet Cong child soldiers were therefore allowed to continue their normal lives without being forced to experience contempt from those around them – which, in turn, had a positive impact on their mental health in the aftermath of the war. However, it has to be underlined that even with the general acceptance and official celebration of former revolutionaries, it was not rare for them to struggle with economic life or relate to civilians, as I will elaborate below. The next sections outline the struggle and how their habitus helped them negotiate it.

7.3. Mismatch between realities and expectations

The general trend that the interviews reveal is the relatively peaceful transition to post-war life. Their communities welcomed former child soldiers warmly. Yet, as Vu (2020, p. 62; my translation) articulated: 'However big the celebrations were, they all came to an end, just like every day comes to a sunset'. Many veterans still found that post-war life did not grant them immediate happiness, and multiple interviewees described the disappointment that former guerrillas experienced. Perhaps the best articulation is made by Quan:

> After liberating the South, everyone was happy, everyone was excited. But then, many people became disappointed. Disappointed because many thought that after liberation of the South, they would get rich immediately, be happy immediately, get to eat a lot immediately. But later they found that it is not easy, so many people were shocked and had to endure hardships in many aspects of life.

Several themes were prominent in my interviews which contributed to this conflict between expectations and reality. The first is the collapse of the Vietnamese economy, which had meant that even with the veterans' privileges, economic life was difficult. The salaries, financial renumeration, and food rations were not enough. Even with salaries, there were often not enough

products to buy: for example, after the struggle with the US, Vietnam had to import rice despite being full of rice fields.

In addition, the socialist regime, undermined by an economic crisis, did not always compensate former revolutionaries with the promised rewards. Youth Shock Brigade members, in particular, suffered the most negative consequences, because they were seen as a rather informal and temporary group set up specifically to help guerrillas on the rears, rather than a branch of a national liberation force. As described in the previous chapter, Youth Shock Brigade members lived according to the discipline and set of rules which were similar to those of guerrillas. The tasks they carried out were essential to guerrillas' operations on the battlefields, and were as physically and emotionally demanding. Many members of the organisation expected to receive social prestige as a result of their involvement in the political struggle. However, the recognition did not seem to go beyond prioritisation in employment. On the contrary, while guerrillas' contributions were recognised on the official level via medals, awards, and some form of financial remuneration, Youth Shock Brigade members were largely overlooked by the government and by society.

Tien also admitted that many of these youths 'lived like cavemen', only knowing to carry out their jobs and never thinking far in advance about what society might look like post-war, and how to survive in it. She articulated that it was particularly the case for younger Youth Shock Brigade members, while older ones did think about future careers and therefore could calculate the possible difficulties and challenges associated with it. As such, in post-war society, many young volunteers 'weren't very smart'. 'Smart' in this context is not a reflection of their capabilities – rather, it referred to being cunning and shrewd enough to live and build a career in conditions where corruption and self-interest was more prominent. As a result, she remembered some of her comrades even hiding the fact that they participated as Youth Shock Brigade members from other villagers, because they were embarrassed to be so poor even despite serving in the revolution. In her words, it almost did not matter that they won the war – when they came home, their economic situation was not much different from those who lost. Their role was largely forgotten until at least the 90s, when former Youth Shock Brigade members started to demand that their history and sacrifices are acknowledged (Guillemot, 2009). Even the privileges that she experienced were not always what she expected: for example, when her workplace calculated her work experience, they did not count her Youth Shock Brigade membership years towards work. Instead, they classified it as 'studying'. As such, while it was still viewed as a valuable time

and worthy of acknowledgement, it stopped Tien from receiving 'work experience' years which, in turn, affected her position in the organisation and salary.

Quyen's case presents an illustration of the mismatch between veterans' expectations and the realities they had to face. His case, in particular, highlights that the levels of privilege varied between the veterans. We have seen in Chapter 5 that he tried to join the guerrillas but was denied entry due to being underweight and underage. However, the constant judgement of his fellow villagers forced him to join the guerrillas using any means. He also recounted being touched by the patriotic speeches and Vietnamese history. He then signed up to participate in the war with Youth Shock Brigades. Throughout his work, he reported learning from his peers, helping villagers, and always doing his best to figure out how to carry out jobs in the best way possible. In his accounts, we can see the importance of discipline and saving face. Even though he could not and did not want to desert, he coped with difficulties by thinking of 'when the victorious day comes', reflecting his internalisation of the propaganda by the Viet Cong.

When talking about his immediate post-war life, however, he articulated that life was not as he expected. He was disappointed to see society moving away from the lifestyle he was exposed to for so long before and after joining the struggle. He initially found this environment 'materialistic', 'corrupted', and difficult to navigate, which directly affected his ability to find a job after coming back. The provincial authorities said: 'Comrade, you are a wounded veteran… please bear with us while we look for a suitable job for you'. Quyen 'waited and waited until he was tired'. Later, he spoke to his other veteran friends, who told him he was 'stupid': he needed to give money to the cadres in order to receive a job. This was when he realised how different his environment became. Below is a fragment of our conversation, where he assesses his own realisation:

> Quyen (quietly): You know [after coming back], negative things started happening in the society. In reality, corruption appeared immediately after establishing peace [with regards to him needing to have money to get a job].

> Interviewer: I am surprised to hear this. I would expect people who served in the war to be respected.

> Quyen (louder): That's right! I thought so too! That I would be welcomed… as a hero, welcomed back to work. But those are our innocent thoughts. But people on the outside of the battlefield, their thoughts were very materialistic.

He did admit that his case was not very prevalent, and explicitly pointed out that it was a more common occurrence among lower-ranking cadres, who were the ones he dealt with. However, it also serves as an illustration of a boy for whom the post-war realities did not meet his expectations.

The second factor causing the conflict between expectations and reality was the difference in everyday life as a soldier and as a civilian. This issue was particularly relevant to the guerrillas who left their homes. While it is true that many soldiers were not immediately removed from village life, the difference between guerrilla and civilian lifestyle still affected their consequent post-war reintegration. As guerrillas, my interviewees lived according to specific rules and camaraderie; their everyday life was governed by emphasis on honour and self-sacrifice. Similar sentiments were expressed by Vu (2020, p. 58; my translation):

> The life of the soldier is used to carrying out orders, used to the life of discipline and routine, everything was simple because everyone around was the same. Everything was common, there was nothing personal. Even letters from home, letters from girlfriends or love stories, would always be shared with friends and comrades. There were personal stories of one person, that even the company knew. But once we came back home, even though the neighbourhood connection was there, there were still personal stories that you couldn't share.

This was reinforced even further by the disappearance of revolutionary idealism which has already been analysed by Kolko (2007) above, and been observed by Marr (2000, p. 793). The general consensus among my interviewees was that the common enemy during the war forced everyone to focus on one common effort; yet, in peaceful life, everyone had to care for themselves first and foremost. It provided a difficult test to those who were loyal to the revolution's initial values, and to guerrillas' tight-knit camaraderie. For those who participated in the war, this shift to individualism is associated with rising competition, conflict, and ruptures in social life, which stands in stark contrast to the unity projected during fighting (Malarney, 2002). My interviewees echoed very similar sentiments, with some going further to assert that the rising self-interest contributed to the rise of corruption and materialism (this link is also reinforced by some Vietnamese commentators, such as Lai, 2019). Many people I interviewed recalled that they found it hard to adjust to the shift from the unity and strong camaraderie to what they perceived was a competitive, materialistic, and more fragmented society. For example, my interviewee, Cuong, expressed his sadness when the war was over:

> After war, I have to say this… even though you didn't have to die, you only waited to go home, but there was still something very sad. Sad, because there was no more comrade spirit […] I mean, the war was over, we were alive, there was no death – especially in the South. Everyone wanted the war to be over, to end the grief, but there were many times when I thought – the war is over, and suddenly, the human love was over, too. Sometimes I feel sad about that.

For those who left their villages, the issue of relating to their friends was also difficult. Even though my interviewees reported maintaining amicable relations with civilians – none of them mentioned feeling particularly lonely and isolated – some of my interviewees admitted not being able to relate to their friends as much anymore. For example, Si recalled catching up with old friends after he came back from the war:

> It is true that there are a few things where I was more outdated than others. For example, there were a number of friends who come back from overseas, they talked about how China was, how the Soviet Union was, but I didn't know about this. At the time, there was no radio to listen to, either. Sometimes I did feel a bit lost. I didn't understand anything about the outside world, while they talked about flying, eating bread and soup, and I didn't know what those are.

The privileges my interviewees experienced in social and economic life, then, did not prevent them from experiencing hardships, initial disappointment, and struggles in post-war life. Nevertheless, they still manage to reconciliate these. The next sections address the ways in which they managed to apply aspects of their guerrilla identity to navigate the post-war environment.

7.4. Negotiating the mismatch: refusal to be victimised

When asked about the ways in which they coped with the post-war difficulties, many of my interviewees stressed the importance of making an active decision to be optimistic and rely on themselves in integrating and building their civilian lives. In doing so, they highlighted that their ability to negotiate the conflict arising from their expectations and the post-war reality was a result of their own reflections and an active refusal to be victimised.

For example, some child soldiers I interviewed chose to be content with the privileges they had and decided not to ask for more. Si's thoughts were particularly illuminating with regards to this.

When I mentioned the disappointment many former veterans felt, he agreed that it was a common sentiment, but he had already reflected on it many times. After reflecting, he came to this conclusion:

> You [former guerrillas] already have people caring and asking about you, about those who joined the resistance. This led to… some people demanding, without striving to be better, for everyone to care about them. But that's only making their lives more difficult. I've thought about it already – veterans already have a pension, financial assistance, social benefits, little gifts for holidays… that's a sign of respect. If you ask for more, it would be sad. After all, the country has gone through decades of war, and your contribution is only a small part in the overall success. If you demand more, it will be very difficult for you.

In a similar vein, many former guerrillas recounted quickly coming to terms with the fact that they should not expect too much from the government or society soon after their inability to help became apparent. This was, for example, the case with Loan. After she completed her job as a sapper, she came back from the war to her village. However, she then discovered that she was not qualified for any available jobs at the time – most open positions looked for someone with scientific and technological knowledge. In addition, she was classified as a wounded soldier, with her health barring her from being able to take jobs at factories. Despite having quick thinking and strategising skills, which were valuable qualities while she was a guerrilla, she still faced many struggles at the beginning of her life as a civilian. She described feelings of confusion, feeling lost and unsupported even despite her family welcoming her back and receiving a small financial remuneration for her service. However, she remembered understanding very quickly that she will have to 'take care of herself by herself'. 'There were too many people suffering… it would be too long until the government would be able to take care of me', she realised. I asked whether she was shocked or disappointed at that realisation. She replied that this was something she was already prepared for. This was because she observed the socio-economic situation and witnessed severe food shortages and 'stories that you'd think would only exist in books', e.g., scooters running on coal because there was no petrol, or local offices selling car tires instead of rice. She understood that she had to be self-reliant in building her life for herself. Apart from these observations and conclusions that she had consciously drawn herself, she also displayed an optimism which she described was common to her family and village. 'But I was not sad', she remembered. 'I was just so happy that national liberation had been achieved, that sleeping on the floor was good enough'.

In these cases, we can see how internal reflections led to the interviewees' active choice not to view themselves as victims. As a result, they were more willing to navigate and find ways to build a civilian life in any ways they could. This is illustrated, for example, in My's story. At 19, she returned to her village after the war and continued studying while also working as a nurse. Being a nurse was a job in high demand – yet, her salary was not enough and she recalled having financial struggles constantly. For example, she often went to sleep not knowing where tomorrow's food will come from. Despite this, she remembered always trying to be optimistic: 'I slept at night thinking that I don't have any money today, there is nothing for my family to eat. But I would only think like that for two seconds. Then I would tell myself: okay, sleep first. Thinking about it all night won't solve anything, food isn't going to appear, and I will be more tired tomorrow'. Her specific way of overcoming difficulties was taking side jobs which made use of her other skills – for example, sometimes she helped at a provincial office with typing documents. The main source of her resilience, as she asserted, was in her choice to maintain an optimistic outlook and a belief that she will be able to deal with any challenges that might come.

A similar choice to be optimistic was echoed by Duc, who reflected with me on the fact that many veterans did not receive a good job or adequate financial assistance, while others led comfortable lives:

> I can't compare myself to others, I can't wonder why this person is rich and I am not. I just cheer myself up – everyone has their own destiny. So instead, I try to help those who are less fortunate. Because if we compare ourselves with other people, we feel sorry for ourselves – we can't live like that. They have two arms, two legs, and a head like me. I will just live my way, lead a simple, normal life, and don't think too much.

We can see, then, that despite not receiving what they thought they were entitled to, my interviewees were able to reconcile the conflict between their expectations and reality without seeing themselves as victims. In their perception, this was a consequence of their own actions and internal reflections. However, a deeper analysis of their responses also reveals the role of their habitus in helping them to reconcile the conflict between their expectations and realities. The next sections focus on the ways in which these contradictions were reconciled.

7.5. Habitus reconciliation of contradictions

The misfit between familiar practices and a new social environment prompts different reactions from the habitus: resistance (Adams, 2006), discomfort and insecurity (Reay, Crozier & Clayton, 2009), becoming a source of adaptation (van Eijk, 1999), or generating new responses as required by the new 'rules' (Sutherland & Darnhofer, 2012). However, as Aarseth, Layton and Nielsen (2016, p. 158) observed, ultimately the conflicts between habitus and field do not always 'doom' the subjects 'to a life of suffering'. Rather, these tensions can be negotiated with each other. For example, in Aarseth, Layton and Nielsen's (2016) study, the suggested negotiation can occur through heightened reflexivity, assessment of the old and new environments, finding positive things about the new circumstances, and reconciling the conflict of being in multiple emotional states.

A consistent theme throughout my interviews was that habitus formed as a result of being a peasant child, and later as a guerrilla, acted as a way to sustain the veterans' hope for the future and navigate their new lives as civilians, workers, or students. While it is true that their internal reflections and an active choice to not be victimised played a role in the adaptation to the new realities, there was also a complicated process of using their habitus to negotiate the misfit between subjective and objective structures. A closer look, then, is necessitated to understand how they used their past to negotiate the misfit between subjective and objective structures. Their subsequent explanations often included the ways in which they learned to observe the surrounding environment, navigate it, and find the best ways to integrate – often specifically using the skills and knowledge previously acquired as guerrillas.

7.5.1 Loyalty to the VCP's goals

Despite the many hardships former veterans went through even after the wars ended, they chose not to discard and forget their military past – even though at least part of the reason why they experienced such strong disillusionment was the socialisation in the guerrilla groups. The idea of preserving one's revolutionary ideals – and by extension, one's identity as a former guerrilla – has been articulated many times throughout my interviews. For example, one of my interviewees stated that he simply does not give himself permission to forget his time as a guerrilla – as a sign of respect to his own memories and his past. Again, this has been facilitated by the fact that the communist supporters won the war, thus leaving space for the former revolutionaries to express loyalty and use it in their subsequent post-war reintegration. By contrast, as we have seen before, the GVN supporters would be 're-educated' and asked to discard their previous loyalties.

Compared to the GVN counterparts, my interviewees, then, did not have an additional layer of ideological conflict, thus facilitating – rather than challenging – an easier transition and adaptation in the difficult post-war years.

Their training as guerrillas, for example, became useful – particularly for my interviewees in the South, when the socialist government started to introduce co-ops and policies for land allocation. For example, a frequent answer to my question of how they coped with the economic hardships was 'I lived according to ideology', or 'I was already prepared'. Unlike civilians for whom these programmes were new, my interviewees were already familiar with these programmes and the justifications the Party used to implement them (as described in section 2.1, these included more efficient production, utilisation of available resources, and ultimately bettering the lives of peasants). As such, most of them reported not being surprised by the policies – on the contrary, these changes were expected. In turn, it is this familiarity and preparedness that was enough to sustain their ability to cope with economic and social hardships.

More importantly, perhaps, guerrillas' socialisation allowed them to develop a loyalty to the socialist leadership and the communist ideology which again helped to sustain faith and optimism, particularly when contrasted against the GVN supporters and many Southern peasants. Hung remembered seeing many people leaving South Vietnam to become refugees in America; even as a child of a revolutionary family, he found many policies issued by the socialist government illogical. However, he asserted that he was determined to collaborate with the socialist policies even if he did not agree with them: 'People like me are responsible for defending this country, this regime, because we believed that the society will be better'. Similar sentiments were echoed by Duc who, after being discharged from the war, found himself 'dying just over trying to figure out what to eat'. Nevertheless, as he stated:

> My country being like that, I accepted it. But I lived according to ideology. I believed in the leadership of the Party. I thought– this period is difficult right now, my country is still poor, but I am a citizen, I will try to strive to overcome difficulties. Then the economy developed. I believed in the future: if I build the country with the government, then I will overcome it all. Since I followed the Party, I accepted it. But there were also people in Saigon who crossed the border, they found it too difficult. Because the state took the regime in the North and applied it in the South, many people did not like it. But whoever understood the revolution, knew that we had to cooperate with the state to build the economy.

We can see, then, that in the case of my interviewees, their guerrilla identity helped them not only get used to the new economic realities, but also sustain a hope for the future. Since many of my interviewees already understood the reasons for implementing agricultural co-ops, and knew how they operated, they also learned to navigate the socialist economy faster and devised coping strategies for themselves – for example, cooperating with the government, or agreeing to protect the regime even in spite of their personal disagreements.

7.5.2 Transferring guerrilla skills and experience to everyday life

While the socialist government often prioritised former revolutionaries and Youth Shock Brigades members in job and education allocation, my interviewees still found that they had to rely on themselves to succeed in their respective studies or jobs. Many former child soldiers I interviewed, particularly those who went on to study, recalled that they were able to become some of the best students in their classes, and attributed their success to the discipline, resilience to hardships, and determination shaped by the guerrilla lifestyle. They were not the only ones – as Duc remembered, many people who served in the army could build lives for themselves, because 'they were used to hardships, and now they work hard to make money when they came home'. This section elaborates and analyses how their past as a guerrilla enabled them to cope with hardships of employment and studying.

In Chapter 5, I have outlined the idea that child soldiering, for many of my interviewees, was continuous to the child labour practices which were common in mid-20th century Vietnam. In addition, it was seen as a part of being a 'good' child – one that actively participates in the revolution. This sentiment continued after the war: child soldiering was often articulated as an activity which helped children gain useful skills. Many of my interviewees stated that after returning from the wars and starting work – now in their 20s – they discovered that their experience as child soldiers shaped them in ways that helped them work better. They were able to use the creativity and relationships developed as a part of coping with war hardships and transfer it to their subsequent employment. This is a sentiment echoed by Vietnamese people – not only with regards to children but to young guerrillas in general. Turner (2002, p. 95) interviewed a Vietnamese veteran and a military professor about the poor conditions and training Youth Shock Brigades members received during their time on the battlefields; he countered that such military life 'offered many young people the chance to learn new skills' and thus contributed to better life post-war. Vinh's story is perhaps the best illustration of the continuities that characterised children's lives after the war. As mentioned in the previous chapters, he was tasked with maintaining the Viet Cong camps, acting as a cook at first, then the kitchen manager, and running

various errands in between his usual duties. For him, these tasks were continuous to the child labour practices that were already present in Vietnam at the time. When he finished his mission towards the end of the war, he returned to his home village. His mother asked him to help her on the fields; however, he told her that this line of thinking is 'outdated'. After working with foreigners, becoming a kitchen manager and leaving home, he wanted to explore more jobs outside of his village. In the next years, Vinh 'went wherever they sent' him, reflecting the VCP's tendency to allocate jobs and prioritise former veterans. As a result of the government arranging jobs for him, he ended up working in different places: a radio station, a film factory, an accountant in a bank, etc. He stressed that while the government made many people redundant, they always took him to work while others were let go. He attributed this privilege to his previous experiences of running errands for the Viet Cong camp. As he said – while running those errands, he learned 'from real life' how to do everything honestly and carefully, how to speak with equals and seniors, and how to handle different problems creatively. In his eyes, it made him a good worker, who was thus not surprisingly valued by his workplace.

Similar sentiments carried through in the accounts of former child soldiers who went on to study. A few of my interviewees finished their education immediately after coming back from the battlefields. Some only finished high school education and went to work; others were sent to study in universities and academies. Different interviewees adapted to studying in different ways. For example, Quan knew even before he joined the guerrillas that his passion was studying. Yet, as explained in section 2.2, he initially wanted to study engineering but was allocated to train to become a political officer. He remembered being bored with his subject and feeling very demotivated to study. Eventually, however, he felt that as a good former guerrilla, studying was a duty assigned by the Party and he needed to fulfil it. In turn, it motivated him to study hard: from the second year on, his results were consistently 'Excellent' or 'Outstanding'. In addition to his own ambitions, he acknowledged that his experience with guerrillas trained his resilience: '…War trains us in terms of difficulties, and hardships […] After the war, no hardship was too difficult for me. Later, as a student, sometimes I also felt disappointed, depressed, like I didn't care. But once you've fought alongside guerrillas, then you won't be afraid of any hardships […] Former guerrillas who have a passion of studying, they are very scary. Because they apply the same determination forged in fighting to studying'.

Quan's case is an example of a young guerrilla succeeding in his studies in part because he was passionate about it; however, this was not always the case for everyone. He recognised that some of his comrades could not get used to learning: 'Once they opened a book, they fell asleep'.

Another one of my interviewees presents a similar case. We have seen Si become a main force guerrilla, overcoming physical hardships of war such as lack of salt, long distances walked barefoot, and frequent illnesses. However, when he came back, he realised that he 'did not know how to study', feeling sad and surprised by it. His reasoning for eventually understanding how to do it well was similar to Quan's: 'This is the core of a soldier during the war... Our mentality was this: just carry out missions according to the Party assignment. Once something is assigned, it has to be carried out'. While their initial difficulties in studying were different, their ways of overcoming them echo each other – appeal to one's past as a guerrilla, and apply core features of the guerrilla identity to civilian life.

7.5.3 Camaraderie as a source of support

The importance of camaraderie, which was continually reinforced throughout guerrilla life, continued in the post-war period. Former child soldiers I interviewed actively maintained relationships with their comrades, often prioritising these relationships over those with friends who did not participate in the struggle. For example, many of my interviewees frequently stated that on celebrations, they would gather with comrades first, and with friends and neighbours second. In turn, this is in line with the idea of comrades becoming their 'second family' – a notion perpetuated consistently by guerrillas. Many recounted holding gatherings and forums where they reflected on their past experience, setting up their own organisations for provision of social and financial support. The importance of these networks is implied in Quan's statement that those who did not participate in the revolution might think veterans are 'not normal' for always recounting stories of the past; yet, the former comrades did so frequently while drinking and eating together. The idea of camaraderie as a more 'noble' type of friendship has also been reinforced throughout many of my interviews.

These friendships had many avenues to be exercised, both formal and informal. With regards to formal networks, perhaps most notable is the Veteran's Association set up by the new government in the late 1980s. It was instrumental in providing a support network for former guerrillas, providing a space to socialise, connect, and carry out charitable and promotional activities. Indeed, I have found some of my interviewees through Veterans and Youth Shock Brigade Member Associations; when visiting them, I was greeted in a common room with several members drinking tea, passing around sweets, and catching up. No one paid much attention to me, only asking me to sit and drink tea with them while waiting for my interviewee to arrive. The casual and relaxed atmosphere suggested that these gatherings were a frequent occurrence.

The Association outlined several goals – notably, the promotion of support networks was highlighted in its original goal: '…to care and help veterans improve their material and spiritual lives […] organize activities for veterans to help each other in life' (as laid out by Nguyen, 2021). Such associations were instrumental in providing the veterans with a space where their communist and fighter identity was continually reinforced (a particular prominent demonstration of this is how the Association refers to its members as 'Uncle Ho's good soldiers'). Throughout the three decades of its existence, the Association organised multiple campaigns which aimed to promote the socialist regime and cultivate positive relations among its members. Multiple records exist of campaigns undertaken by various branches of the Association: for example, Thanh (2021) reported Ninh Hai's branch campaigning for a fundraiser (named 'Camaraderie's love') to donate money to for reparations of former veterans' housing; others helped veterans find employment; there are also records of the Veteran's Association collaborating with the Women's Association and Youth Association and tackling issues of crime, drug use and poverty (e.g. Thu, 2021). Like the Veteran's Association, Youth Shock Brigade members also have their own 'Ex-Youth Shock Brigade Members' Association, with many similar roles and activities. Much like the Veteran's Association, Youth Shock Brigade Member Association organises campaigns for charity purposes (specifically to help low-income members), helping with manual work including house-building, and giving gifts to its members on special occasions such as national holidays commemorating the wars (e.g. as reported by Khanh, 2020).

Many of my interviewees noted that these Associations further played an instrumental role in helping them feel celebrated, respected, and cared for. For example, Duc mentioned that members of the Veterans' Association frequently brought him gifts, visited him, chatted, and 'cheered me up from time to time'; he thought that this was already very 'precious and shows special care' for veterans. He was not the only one – my interviewees consistently made frequent references to these acts of gift-giving, visiting, and chatting 'to cheer them up', inquiring about their health from fellow members of these Associations. In turn, then, it had meant that these veterans had a constant and reliable source of material and social support, which was institutionally reinforced. Their social ties and identities as guerrillas, then, were recognised on an official level, therefore providing them, once again, with a support network which helped them navigate the disappointment in the supposedly more fragmented post-war reality.

The role of informal networks in helping this navigation further cannot be discounted. My interviewees consistently referred to the importance of not only formal networks, but old friendships, in helping them find their footing in post-war society. My interviewee, Duc, even

referred to having his own – informal – network of former guerrillas who served specifically in his village. This network frequently carried out their own fundraising campaigns to help comrades in financial difficulties, who were ill, unemployed, etc. He remembered often participating in their activities, helping them with what he could. This highlights, then, the willingness of veterans to be the source of support even outside of formally established institutions.

A story by Vu (2020) published in an autobiographical book *Us after war*, presents a particularly interesting case. In this instance, the bonds formed by the guerrillas were not only an essential source of moral support and friendship, but also played an immediate role in the wider community acceptance. Vu recounts a story of his former older comrade who, despite being a brave fighter and a good mentor to him, decided to desert guerrillas. When he came back to the village, the commune ostracised him. Despite the ostracisation by the villagers, his kindness and bravery was remembered by his former comrades, who generally sympathised and understood that it was an 'impulsive mistake'. As such, they frequently came to see him, helping him financially and encouraging him to persevere through tough times. Seeing the strong relationship between the ostracised former guerrilla and his comrades, the villagers changed their minds: 'Political cadres come and ask about him, with an attitude which is very friendly and respectful. So what kind of person he must be, for them to treat him like that? Then, from looking down on him, that commune started to understand and respect him more' (Vu, 2020, p. 101; my translation)

In the same book, he states that even memories of comrades who died in the battles played a role in his reintegration. In his words:

> The life ahead is not our personal life, but also for others. That seemed to be the debt that every soldier who returned from the ranks carried with himself and had to live in a way that would be worthy of the sacrifice of their comrades […] Most soldiers like us thought that way. And it seemed that this way of thinking helped us reintegrate in a life that would be impossible to get used to immediately. (Vu, 2020, p. 59; my translation)

He was not the only one: Duc also remembered coming every year to old battlefields to light incense and pay respects on his comrades' graves. He stated that sometimes, even the soldiers' families and spouses could not come on the exact days of celebrations or anniversaries, while he and other comrades would come every year, regardless of the weather, or their own circumstances. 'At the same time, while lighting the incense, I am reminded of the past and reminded to live well', he stated. Many of my other interviewees remembered that they did not

want to complain about post-war life, no matter how difficult it was, because they were always aware of how lucky they were simply to survive.

In doing so, again, the guerrillas displayed capability for empathy and the importance of social ties – even to those who were not present in their lives. This contrasts with the portrayals of children being irreparably damaged by witnessing death and losing their friends. In the case of my interviewees, the love and empathy they felt for their comrades, became a source of help in their subsequent reintegration. The articulation of 'living well' as a duty towards comrades who died, again, highlights the sense of camaraderie, practiced and forged through their times in guerrilla groups. However, it also points to the ability of young guerrillas to turn negative emotions into an important source of resilience, necessary to negotiate and come to terms with the hardships of post-war life. Similar sentiments have been articulated explicitly by Watson (2015): articulating negative emotions such as grief as an automatic and inseparable feature of victimhood ignores how children can – and do – channel these into shaping new identities, activism, political participation, and rebuilding their lives.

7.6. Conclusion

Depending on the conflict and the post-war environment of a specific country, the outcomes of child soldier reintegration vary. In some cases, children exhibited difficulties with socialisation and anti-social behaviour, which became a major challenge towards reintegration (Boothby, 2006; Veale & Stavrou, 2007) and exhibited major signs of depression and post-traumatic stress (Boothby, 2006). Other cases reported community stigmatisation (Özerdem & Podder, 2011; Denov & Marchand, 2014) and difficulties with returning to civilian life after being excluded for years (Denov, 2011). In addition, as Watson (2015, p. 55) observed, in many instances, job creation for youth would 'simply not be a priority for either donors or the presiding government'. This, in turn, translated into a lack of opportunities for education and employment for former youth combatants (Annan, Brier, & Aryemo, 2009; Blattman & Annan, 2008; Boothby, 2011). The need to redefine one's whole identity is another factor often mentioned as a challenge in child soldiers' post-war lives (Honwana, 1999; Denov, 2011). Some problems further stemmed from the fact that former child soldiers were specifically under 18, thus hindering their ability to access financial and reintegration benefits (Zyck, 2011; McMullin, 2011). Another predominant theme is the loss of power and agency, particularly for those who held positions of dominance prior to demobilisation

(Zyck, 2011). This, in turn, led to reports of having to 'forget' their past in favour of starting a new life (Annan, Brier & Aryemo, 2009).

Simultaneously, much research has repeatedly highlighted the abilities of former child soldiers to adapt and display resilience, even amidst unstable economic and political post-war environments (Özerdem & Podder, 2011). Research further highlights that ex-youth combatants display qualities such as strength and strong leadership (Jordans et. al, 2012; Kryger & Lindgren, 2011), as well as the ability to eventually reintegrate with their communities and find employment (Veale & Stavrou, 2007; Blattman & Annan, 2010; Jordans et. al, 2012). Further, Özerdem and Podder (2001) highlight that the extent to which children successfully reintegrate in their communities depends on the outcomes of the conflict. Victors, as they state, 'integrate easily and often dominate the political scene' (Özerdem & Podder, 2011, p. 314). By contrast, those who fought for the unpopular rebel factions lose more social capital, are excluded from the social landscape, therefore suffering greater impact on their mental health and success of their reintegration (Blattman & Annan, 2010). These factors – whether children were presented with economic opportunities, whether they won the struggle – all contributed to the relatively seamless transition of my interviewees from war to post-war, but are also specific to their social context.

The case of my interviewees, then, presents an account of what happens when former youth combatants find themselves on the side that won. In turn, this allowed them to escape stigma and enjoy certain privileges, especially in comparison to people who fought for the GVN. While this caused social tensions between people who supported the communist government and those who supported the GVN, these tensions were caused by the political implications of supporting opposed regimes, rather than by child soldiering itself. Another factor which is specific to the context of post-war Vietnam is the fact that, being left to its own devices, the Vietnamese state and communities were the primary agents facilitating child soldier reintegration, without interference of the international community. This response was, then, affected by the Vietnamese definition of childhood. Since it was not free of labour, duties, and responsibilities, the children I interviewed did not have to experience disempowerment as a result of them taking up arms. The issued policies with regards to education employment and financial remuneration, for example, privileged former revolutionaries – young or not – without considering them 'lost' or 'dangerous' children. Instead, they perceived it as employment of loyal and capable people who could be beneficial for rebuilding economy. Lastly, the fact that the Viet Cong guerrillas were deeply integrated in peasant lives, children were never excluded from their communities; as such, their work as guerrillas did not have a negative effect on their socialisation.

Despite these privileges, the fact that post-war life came as a disappointment to many of my interviewees cannot be discounted. Many of them expected to immediately improve their economic situation, while others anticipated more prestige and respect than they received in reality. Many of my interviewees repeated that post-war life was difficult in unimaginable, unpredictable ways. Their active choice and refusal to be victimised also has to be acknowledged. Some of my interviewees reference explicitly their conscious and deliberate reflections on their choice to approach life with hope and optimism, deciding to let go of envy, or coming to terms with their position in society. As with recruitment and their time as guerrillas, then, children and youth displayed complex internal lives, which, in turn, was an important factor in shaping their future.

However, the conflict between their expectations and reality was also reconciled in large part because of the habitus of my interviewees. Being child soldiers who were socialised into joining the revolution from a young age, and who later spent considerable amounts of time learning about communism, they eventually learned to navigate the hardships of post-war life with their previous knowledge of communism and skills developed as guerrillas. In turn, it helped them retain faith in the VCP, as well as articulate the hardships as a necessary step in rebuilding the country's economy and future. In addition, the attitudes towards labour they formed as children helped them view their experience with guerrillas as a time when they learned to be resilient and capable workers – again, common features of a 'good' guerrilla. These parts of the habitus, too, helped them live through the difficulties of post-war life: they believed that if they were already used to the hardships of war, they would be able to do so at peace. Lastly, the camaraderie and sense of unity with their fellow fighters acted as an important source of support for my interviewees, creating social circles where their identities as guerrillas were encouraged and reflected upon. Moreover, their experience highlights the benefits of preserving – rather than discarding – their past as soldiers and guerrillas, and the ways in which it can negotiate the mismatch between expectations and reality.

Conclusion

1. Introduction

This thesis analysed children's participation in the Vietnam War, tracing the aspects of Vietnamese childhood which shaped their child soldiering. More specifically, the research questions of this thesis were as follows:

- Why did child soldiers join guerrilla movements during the Vietnam War?
- What experiences did children have once they joined the guerrilla group and how did they understand them?
- How did children reintegrate into civilian life after the military conflict?

My theoretical questions were as follows:

- How do the politics of military conflict shape the social context within which child soldiers operate?
- More specifically, what role does ideology play in shaping the sociocultural practices of child soldiering?

To address these questions, I conducted life history interviews with former child soldiers, analysing their motivations and experience in the context of Vietnamese history and society. A relational approach focused attention on the environment in which the children were embedded, and the ways in which former child soldiers interacted with it.

The main finding of the thesis was that children's experience of child-soldiering was significantly shaped by their social context, with three aspects being particularly prominent. The first is the Confucian social order which placed emphasis on family loyalty, collectivism, and concern for one's community. The second is the communist ideology, which children were socialised into as part of their life before joining the guerrillas. Together, Confucianism and communism shaped the notion of 'good' Vietnamese concept of childhood, which was the third significant aspect in shaping child soldiers' experience. Children used principles of patriotism, social justice, and equality as a guide in their war and post-war experience. Furthermore, the stories of my interviewees showed that children were multifaceted, knowledgeable individuals with rich and diverse internal lives. These findings are in line with multiple calls to not only attend to children's political subjecthood in research, but also approach

them as a new site of knowledge, which can uncover the variety of roles they play in the international system (Watson, 2006; Beier, 2020).

This chapter will summarise the main findings and arguments of this thesis, as well as its empirical and theoretical contributions. I will firstly synthesise my main conclusions from the three empirical chapters, focusing on child soldier mobilisation, experience with guerrillas, and post-war reintegration. I will then discuss my findings in light of existing research on child soldiering. Specifically, I demonstrate how my research confirms existing findings of earlier research on child soldiers, but also has identified new insights specific to Vietnamese child soldiering – in particular, the role played by Confucianism and the presence of the communist ideology. In turn, these findings can contribute to understanding how child soldier experience is shaped not only by sociopolitical practices, but also political ideology. Afterwards, I will discuss how insights from my research can be applied to study children and youth outside of Vietnamese contexts. I conclude with some reflections on the limitations of my research and brief notes about child soldiering in general.

2. Child soldiering in the Vietnam War

In this section, I will lay out the general empirical findings of my research. Drawing on insights by scholars such as Tisdall and Punch (2012) and Lancy (2016), who criticised the idea of children as rational, individualistic, and autonomous agents, I turned to Bourdieusian relational sociology which allowed me to view my interviewees' decision-making in light of multiple relationships, circumstances, and social contexts. I followed the life histories of former Vietnamese child soldiers as they recounted their experiences prior, during, and after the military struggle with America. I found that much of their experience was shaped by widespread social practices which they often took for granted. However, these practices, nevertheless, were significant causal factors shaping children's motivations and decisions.

With regards to children's experiences of mobilisation, I found that most of my interviewees stressed the voluntary and non-political nature of their recruitment. Upon analysing their responses, I found that many of my interviewees believed their participation to be non-political because it was not articulated in terms of formal Marxist ideology. However, their motivations were political in the sense that they were deeply concerned with issues of justice, equality, and foreign intervention. Further, while many of my interviewees consistently highlighted that they

were volunteers, multiple social practices, which existed before children joined the guerrillas, predisposed them to be more likely to take up arms. Several of these practices stood out in particular. The first is the role of family loyalty and filial piety, with many children joining the guerrillas because this is what was 'done' in their family. The second is the prevalence of child labour in Vietnam at the time, which meant that children were used to assuming arduous responsibilities and often viewed child soldiering as just one of many jobs available to them. The third was the militarisation of everyday life, which meant that the idea of participating in the war was not alien to children's worldviews, but instead was seen as a realistic option. The militarisation of everyday life normalised their taking up arms or involving themselves with the struggle in other ways.

Next, I explored the experiences children underwent once they had become guerrillas. I found that from the beginning, and throughout their time as guerrillas, children were exposed to intense political and military training. Indeed, political education appeared to be a particularly important feature of their lives as guerrillas; this is where many of my interviewees first learned about and could explicitly articulate the notions of communism, patriotism, and anti-colonialism. In addition, unit commanders worked hard to socialise children into developing a distinct 'guerrilla' identity, teaching them the guerrilla code of conduct, and explaining the meaning behind their activities. I found that children were given relative freedom and autonomy by guerrillas to conduct their missions as they saw fit; in general, there was an expectation that children would fulfil their jobs with as little guidance as possible. Despite the expected independence, however, children were highly restricted by their positions as subordinates. In this sense, their independence was still confined to what their commanders saw as appropriate, with minimal input from the children themselves. However, even within that limited space, children demonstrated their ability to navigate and interact with the new social context: they learned to fuse newly learned political concepts with their own sense of justice, and to ignore the rules of the hierarchy when they knew they could get away with it. They learned to use other people's expectations of childhood to fulfil their missions successfully, and carved out space for friendships and mutual support to navigate the hardships of living in the middle of a war. In doing so, they demonstrated their capability for change and problem-solving.

Lastly, I analysed children's experiences post-war. I found that while many of them expected their life to improve immediately, the reality was the opposite: the Vietnamese economy descended into economic crisis immediately after the war due to sanctions and political mismanagement. However, many of my interviewees were in a position where their previous

experience with guerrillas enabled them to navigate the post-war hardships without feeling discouraged or defeated. Many of these, again, could be traced to the context within which they volunteered and reintegrated into their communities. Firstly, my interviewees were victors of the war, which meant that they were in a position of relative privilege, especially in comparison to their counterparts who had worked for the GVN. Secondly, they were already familiar with and indeed expecting many of the policies which the communist government implemented. They also retained faith that the government would be able to overcome the economic and political hardships. Lastly, they cultivated strong networks – both formal and informal – which sustained and helped them navigate the hardships of the post-war environment.

Overall, my findings point towards the conclusion that children were deeply involved in both Vietnamese military conflicts. Much like adults', their experience was shaped by their social and historical context. Multiple factors specific to their habitus – their idea of a 'good child', the socialisation by guerrillas – facilitated both their mobilisation and work with guerrillas as well as their later post-war reintegration as former revolutionaries.

3. Empirical contributions to research on child soldiers: Child soldiering in Vietnam

3.1 Impact of Confucianism

Throughout my interviews, several themes surfaced as particularly important and specific to the Vietnamese child soldiers. The first is the role of family in predisposing children to join the guerrillas and in maintaining their spirits and fighting once they became a part of the struggle. The second is the importance of the principles of face-saving and honour for the children before and during serving with guerrillas. The third is the fact that children, despite their expectations of independence, remained in a position of subjugation and confined to a strict hierarchy. These factors, in the case of my interviewees, can ultimately be traced to the Confucian social order, and indicates that prevalent cultural frameworks impact child soldiering. In this section, I will analyse each of these factors and its implications for the literature of child soldiering.

3.1.1. Importance of filial piety

In contemporary academic literature on conflicts, family - whether nuclear or extended - rarely appears as the primary source of *motivating* children to take up arms. Rather, research has found that family appears either as a tranquil environment from where children are kidnapped (e.g. Denov & Maclure, 2007), or a broken institution from which children are forced to flee (e.g. Yinusa et. al, 2018). However, my exploration of child soldiers in Vietnamese military conflicts reveals not only the importance, but also the extent to which family can serve as a political motivator for child soldiers. My findings show that for many child soldiers, the decision to take up arms did not derive from the absence of a loving relationship between them and their parents, but from its presence. The decision to leave one's family, to take up arms, and sometimes to purposefully replace their family with the guerrillas was an expression of filial piety and subsequent fulfillment of their expected roles as children and members of their family.

While on the surface, the idea of children leaving their families and joining the guerrillas goes against some of the core Confucian tenets (which assume that leaving one's family is a breach of filial piety), this decision was still in line with the Confucian social order. For many children, joining the guerrillas meant protecting their parents and contributing to their family's life. It meant doing what they often did not want to do (i.e. leaving their homes) because they believed that this was the best way to prevent their homes from being disturbed. In addition, for many other children, joining the guerrillas was a way to express their loyalty to family traditions – if their parents had already participated in war, they were expected to uphold their reputation and honour. Throughout the hardships they endured during the war, many children's thoughts turned to their parents, which served as a motivation to sustain their spirits and fighting. As such, the idea of children taking up arms can be traced back to wider Confucian societal order, which placed family loyalty and filial piety above self-interest.

The presence of the Viet Cong deepened children's predisposition to take up arms even further. As I pointed out in the earlier chapter on recruitment, they implemented a careful strategy of mass mobilisation and propaganda. The propaganda combined the notion of filial piety with revolutionary participation: in participating in the liberation movement, the guerrillas argued, you will help liberate Vietnam and subsequently, your parents. This, in their eyes, was the ultimate fulfillment of filial piety. The effects of such propaganda were two-fold. First, it helped to attract many enthusiastic members who had faith in the guerrillas' mission. These people, in turn, have been able to share their enthusiasm with their children; due to the Vietnamese expectations of

filial piety, they therefore also expected that the children will follow the parents' footsteps. Secondly, it helped to make a direct connection between being a good child and joining the guerrillas.

Many of these ideas were never explicitly mentioned by my interviewees but were consistently present throughout their stories – for example, while none of them explicitly said 'I love my family', their love was expressed in their descriptions of crying when they left and missing their family as they worked with guerrillas. While no one explicitly articulated participation in the war as an expression of filial piety, statements such as 'I wanted to protect my parents, so of course I took up arms', put in the context of the Confucian filial piety, highlight the prominence of cultural and societal values in shaping children's decisions. In turn, these findings emphasise how seemingly apolitical spaces such as family can be powerful political motivators – not because they are broken or dysfunctional, but precisely because of their affection, intimacy, and mutual loyalties.

3.1.2 Concern for 'face-saving'.

The second theme which became particularly prominent in my interviews was the children's concern for symbolic capital – in other words, issues of 'face-saving' and honour were a consistent source for their motivations and experience. The questions of face-saving do not appear to be a particularly important factors motivating children in contemporary conflicts (they have not been highlighted as factors in Shepler's or Rosenoff's studies, for example). They do appear in the contexts of other cases of militarised youth. Going beyond children's participation in war, Parker (2001) argued that reputation is one of the most essential values for violent gangs. However, in this case, it was inherently tied to children's struggle against 'hopelessness of their existence' (Parker, 2001, p.153). Many of the youths in Parker's study were marginalised, and therefore felt the need to assert their own value. Joining gangs, therefore, was determined by one's leadership skills, dressing well, and popularity in relationships (Parker, 2001, p. 155). None of my interviewees mentioned such concerns with regards to face-saving. For them, it was not a way to cope with one's marginalisation, but a widespread societal value traceable to the Confucian social order, which places face-saving as one of its core principles.

Vietnamese children grew up in a community which socialised them into paying close attention to 'saving face' in order to maintain good relationships with their family and community, and to work hard to maintain their 'face' and personal reputation. In turn, children were constantly aware

that the positive or negative reputation they bear would also have implications for their family and relatives, thus making them even more focused on acquiring symbolic capital. Outside of the context of anticolonial struggles, 'face-saving' and respect would most likely be accumulated in other ways – for example, in doing well at school, working at a certain job, etc. However, in wartime, it translated into participating in the political struggle. Similar arguments were articulated by Bultmann (2015), who observed that participating in struggle, taking part in a certain number of battles, carrying out certain missions become a symbolic resource to accumulate capital, valued specifically in the context of insurgency. While his arguments were made with regards to adult Khmer Rouge insurgents, my interviewees indicated that they can also be applicable to children in their struggle to gain symbolic and social capital.

Such concern for face-saving explains many aspects of Vietnamese child soldiering. For example, carrying out one's duty carelessly, showing fear, running away from their mission would not result in physical punishment, but in being criticised in front of their peers. Even in the absence of physical punishment, the discipline in the guerrilla groups was rigid and effective. This was because the common communist disciplinary device – public criticism sessions – were a powerful enough behavioural tool in a culture so preoccupied with face-saving and personal reputation. Similarly, it can explain some instances of guerrilla enlistment – since children often lived in areas where joining the guerrillas was a normalised social practice, and refusing to do so would result in bringing shame not only to themselves but also to their family. Therefore, whether my interviewees decided to take up arms, whether they were considering leaving the hardships of guerrilla life, whether they thought about the best way to carry out their missions – the concern with face-saving and personal reputation always guided their actions.

This research on Vietnamese child soldiers, then, not only underlines the extent to which societal practices, and the need to conform to them, can motivate children to take up arms and determine their attitude to their subsequent work for armed groups. It also provides an insight into how children are socialised into specific cultural frameworks from their early years, and how these facilitate guerrilla enlistment and maintain a rigid and strict discipline even without physical coercion, punishment, or economic rewards. It is still important to highlight, however, that for the Vietnamese children, such concern was a consequence not only of specific social practices, but also the ways in which these social practices interacted with militarised realities and the presence of insurgency in their everyday life. In turn, it points to the importance of discussions on how cultural aspects, such as a preoccupation with reputation, can have different dimensions in contexts beyond Vietnam. One interesting insight can be traced in Rosen's observation (2005, p.

23) that many Jewish children became partisans during World War 2 because 'children and youth increasingly regarded passive acceptance of death at the hands of their oppressors as a form of national and personal dishonor. The idea of dying with honor began to emerge as a guiding ideology'. The concern for reputation and face-saving, then, can stem from various sources, depending on where a particular person is located and which cultural framework they are embedded in. While the concern for reputation can be traced to a wider Confucian tradition of 'face-saving' in case of my interviewees, it is most likely not the case for many other child soldiers. Examining these cultural aspects can uncover previously understudied facets to child soldiering.

3.1.3 Hierarchy and subjugation

I have argued earlier that in the context of 20th century Vietnamese peasant childhood, children were expected to engage in difficult and complex tasks, resulting in them engaging in child labour, politics, as well as learning how to take on various activities with minimal guidance from adults. Throughout the accounts told by my interviewees, children appeared as relatively independent, even autonomous, individuals. Since the Vietnamese guerrilla groups strived for communism-inspired equality, there was even an attempt to treat children as equal to their comrades. However, a deeper reading of their responses reveals that they were never completely free due to the principles of Confucianism and the nature of Vietnamese social structures which constantly stressed being aware of one's position in relation to other people.

Rather than being completely autonomous, then, children in Vietnamese guerrilla groups were expected to obey the rules and submit to the discipline established by more senior commanders; in line with Confucian tenets, they were expected to fulfil the exact role prescribed to them without any further arguments. Even if they rose in the ranks and were technically equal to their older comrades, they would still find it impossible to escape power relations due to the importance Vietnamese society – and particularly language – places on age. As long as they used the relational pronouns indicating their younger age in relation to their conversationalists, they would always be expected to perform the role of a younger person. This language comes with certain restrictions with regards to politeness, behaviour, and speech. Some guerrilla groups deliberately tried to balance out the age difference by changing relational pronouns, but the children's obedience was still expected simply because they were younger and occupied lower ranks in the group's hierarchy.

Yet, even when located lower in the guerrilla hierarchy, children had much space to exercise their own creativity without much intervention from adults. Indeed, in the accounts of even some of the most difficult and dangerous tasks that my interviewees carried out, it was often implied that they did not expect any help from the adults. Further, they often received only minimal guidance with regards to mastering difficult skills such as cutting stone, using road-building tools, or stealing American equipment. In these cases, children were considered to be capable of making their own judgements independent of adults.

The specifics of Vietnamese childhood, combined with the communist efforts to promote equality and the traditional Confucian order, then, resulted in children finding themselves in a complicated position: not completely marginalised, as is often the case with child soldiers in contemporary conflicts, but not completely independent, either. Yet, these findings can provide explanations for some puzzling questions as to why, for example, child soldiers were given so much freedom to make decisions in risky situations while at the same time often not having basic information such as to whom exactly they are reporting to. The dynamics between guerrillas' efforts to promote equality and Confucian hierarchical order, then, impacted the experience of child soldiers significantly.

3.2. Impact of communism

The impact of ideology was another prominent factor which significantly shaped the motivations and experience of the former child soldiers I interviewed. While the literature on child soldiers tends not to regard ideology as having a significant aspect of child soldiers' lives, it cannot be ignored in the context of Vietnamese military struggles. Particularly interesting is the fact that none of my interviewees explicitly named ideology as the cause they were fighting *for*, i.e., none of my interviewees stated that they took up arms with an aim to establish a communist government – as we have seen, most of the children had little idea of what communism was. Rather, communist ideology influenced the social and cultural practices which children were exposed to in their everyday life. Their experiences further demonstrate the presence of politics beyond slogans and dogmas, illuminating how even if a child does not know ideological slogans by heart, ideology can become an important part of their everyday life.

For example, in recounting their childhood, many interviewees remembered that it was difficult to escape communist propaganda when interacting with guerrillas was a part of their life. This can be traced back to the guerrillas' tactics of mass mobilisation, which included mass propaganda,

talking to peasants, holding informal meetings – all of which resulted in most people knowing someone who had worked for the guerrillas. The language of and concerns for social justice, patriotism, and anti-colonialism became integrated into children's everyday life, even if they did not always register it consciously. This mass mobilisation brought the war close to the children. It therefore became expected that they will, in some form, also participate in the political struggle. These mass mobilisation methods, in turn, can be traced to the Maoist techniques of changing attitudes of the villagers in order to gain popular support – as I have discussed in my chapters on Confucianism and recruitment, the Viet Cong drew freely from the Maoist doctrine and applied it to their own context.

The effect of communist ideology continued to manifest itself when my interviewees started to integrate themselves into guerrilla life. It went beyond children's ability to articulate the core tenets of communism and anticolonialism. Rather, it affected children's everyday lives. The guerrillas were systematic and deliberate in providing their recruits with political education, cultivating a common identity among units, as well as maintaining morale so as to create positive associations between the recruits and the group. Again, these are common communist devices which can be traced back to Mao's writing (Grice, 2019). Self-criticism sessions, which became an effective disciplinary tool, were similarly described as a 'cornerstone of the communist system' and similarly a legacy of Maoist philosophy (Rottman, 2007, p.17). This, in turn, impacted the experience of my interviewees significantly: many reported finding the experience genuinely useful and educational, while others found it meaningful. Again, then, the impact of ideology went beyond my interviewees being able to articulate its basic tenets – it influenced children's daily life and was an important factor in shaping their everyday war experience.

This is not to say that explicit understanding of communist principles did not shape the experience of my interviewees at all. On the contrary, knowing and understanding the core communist policies helped many former guerrillas to reintegrate into post-war society. This, again, is not highlighted in the current research on child soldiers, most likely because the majority of child soldiers in contemporary conflicts are involved in groups which do not stress or do not have the opportunity to carry out systematic campaigns to achieve their political mission. By contrast, the communist government, being victors, had the opportunity to implement a range of diverse communist policies, which many former revolutionaries were already familiar with, and indeed were expecting. This helped them to sustain their optimism and resilience to navigate the many post-war hardships, even when the policies implemented by the communist government proved to be ineffective.

I have found, then, that communist ideology accompanied many of my interviewees throughout their early childhood until the end of the political struggle. Their memories of the 'nationwide revolutionary spirit', the idea that a good person will participate in the political struggle, their faith in the communist government can be ultimately traced to multiple deliberate campaigns conducted by guerrillas. These, in turn, drew inspiration from Maoist philosophy and communist ideology. Like filial piety, the impact of the communist ideology was not explicitly stated by my interviewees. However, I have been able to show that ideological principles were present in children's lives long before they actually decided to join the guerrillas. Such findings still further highlight the political nature of childhood, and the extent to which children are willing to be involved and participate in political activities.

4. Theoretical contributions

4.1 Reconceptualisation of agency as relational and contextual.

The findings from my thesis contribute to theoretical conceptualisations of the child soldier agency. They highlight the usefulness of a relational approach – and specifically, Bourdieu's concepts in order to understand children's agency and its interaction with their sociocultural context. My theoretical framework drew on the work of scholars of childhood and child soldiers who have employed a Bourdieusian relational approach. Studies conducted by Shepler (2014) and Rosenoff (2010), for example, have explored the strategies, motivations, and lived experiences of children involved in contemporary conflicts. In this thesis, I have taken their assumptions and applied them to the context of the Vietnam War against the US. My findings can contribute to the future study of child soldiers beyond Vietnam in two ways. First, by emphasising the usefulness of approaching children's agency as a starting assumption, rather than an end argument; secondly, it demonstrates how these tools can be used to place children's experience in their social and cultural context.

Firstly, my thesis has reaffirmed the usefulness of Bourdieu's tools for analysing decisions made by children. It helped me to move away from conceptualising the experience of children as necessarily shaped by only agency or only structure, and rather to focus on how their actions, thoughts, and motivations were shaped as an interaction of both. They therefore allowed me to engage with children as multifaceted and social actors. With the help of a Bourdieusian approach,

for example, I explored the intelligence and creativity of children while also acknowledging their position of relative subjugation and marginalisation compared to adults. While I am mostly concerned with how the ongoing environment shaped and predisposed children's experience, I have also demonstrated that children did not passively internalise and reinforce existing sociocultural practices. Rather, they creatively navigated their circumstances and made sense of the ongoing war. These findings show that there is much value in approaching children's agency as a starting point rather than as an end argument, as earlier outlined by Thomas (2016). Doing so bypasses the victim vs. perpetrator binary. It also allows for space to conceptualise children's surrounding social contexts as guides of their motivations and experience, which otherwise would not make sense to those who are not embedded in the ongoing military struggle.

In addition, Bourdieu's concepts have helped me to navigate the instances when children exercising agency manifested itself in actions other than active resistance and resilience. Since a relational approach has allowed me to take into account the social context within which many children were embedded, it has also allowed me to understand the restrictions imposed by the context that children were forced to navigate. This is in line with calls by scholars such as Gleason (2016), who have advocated for conceptualising agency beyond children defying adults, resisting authorities, and protecting their interests. It has provided me with useful tools to understand what agency looks like when children *obey* authorities, carry out their assigned missions to the best of their abilities, and reinforce, rather than challenge, the dominant social practices. This understanding, then, provide ways to widen the concept of child soldiers' agency, which is particularly relevant when analysing the experiences of children who fight in extremely restrictive circumstances. An example of such restrictive circumstances are armed groups which forcibly conscript their recruits and threaten to kill them if they desert. Similar observations have already been made with regards to the Khmer Rouge, e.g. child soldiers learning to play a musical instrument in order to gain favour of the commanders and therefore ensure their survival. There is still space to make similar observations in the context of, for example, the Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda, which has been recognised as being to be very restrictive for their child recruits (Preston, 2015).

Secondly, my research further contributed to the literature on child soldiering by providing a relational reading of children's social ties, showing that these factors cannot be ignored when analysing children's motivations and courses of action. For example, as with Rosenoff's (2010) interviewee, their militarised realities shaped the Vietnamese children's understanding of what constitutes 'normal', and what strategies they had to implement in order to cope with the ongoing

war. Perhaps more importantly, as with the Sierra Leone case explored by Shepler (2014), local cultures of childhood had a significant role in shaping the Vietnamese children's understanding of child soldiering and guerrilla work. As was the case with Shepler's interviewees, Vietnamese children lived in a cultural framework in which they were expected to carry out complicated tasks, and to do so with minimal dependence on adults' guidance. Their childhood was not only a time for playing, but also for carrying out various responsibilities and duties. Such expectation was reflected in the way in which many of them had already engaged with child labour practices and participated in their families' economic lives prior to joining the guerrillas. It was further reinforced when they joined the guerrillas and reported very little guidance from adults with regards to their tasks and missions. Children were seen as capable of fulfilling their tasks with minimal supervision, thus reflecting models of childhood where children were expected to be fairly independent from adults' guidance. This specific version of childhood played a significant role in children's experience, influencing not only children's guerrilla recruitment, but also why children were often given difficult and demanding tasks.

In paying close attention to children's social context, my research has also uncovered the influence of militarisation on children. It has shown that Vietnamese child soldiers made choices, particularly with regards to participation in guerrilla activities, based on their previous experience and exposure to militarisation. Children who have been exposed to violence, war, and political discussions with their families and friends, eventually internalise the 'feel for the game' and gain skills and understanding of strategies which are most likely to help them function in highly militarised environments (Velitchkova, 2021). Further, my findings have demonstrated the children's capability for change and flexibility. Rather than passively internalising new rules as they start to become a part of new social environment, children learn when to bend them, when to infuse them with their own understanding of what is right. In other words, as in a similar observation by Winther-Lindqvist (2009, p. 71), children always internalised new rules while also 'spiced up with their own ideas about good behavior, friendship, and justice'. These insights can be applied to wider debates about militarisation of childhood and applied to cases of children who are not direct participants in war: even when they do not become combatants, children still continue to be political subjects, who are shaped and who can shape the so-called 'everyday militarisms' (which includes supporting the war, conforming to the set of wartime value, as defined by Zheng, p.105). This thesis, then, contributes to the strand of literature on militarisation of children which posit that 'militarization does not just happen to children; as complex political subjects, children navigate, engage with militarisms and through them, interpreting, (re)producing, remaking, and resisting' (Beier & Tabak, 2020, p. 287).

A relational approach, therefore, can uncover 'various socio-political practices […] in a thick sociological setting that could otherwise not be identified' (Jacob, 2015, p. 22). It allows the researchers to analyse beyond what is being explicitly said, and take into account what is left *unsaid* as valuable data in itself. I have shown how, for example, Confucian principles were implicit, but powerful in guiding the former child soldiers I have interviewed. However, the same approach can be used to study the experience of young combatants beyond the Vietnamese case study. For example, Cortes and Buchanan (2007) have recorded that many Colombian child soldiers were religious and turned to God as a way to maintain their morale and resilience. The researchers, however, do not elaborate on the role of Catholicism in the Colombian context to put the children's actions in their social context. The Colombian case, then, is one example of how a relational approach can be employed further to understand child soldiers' social and cultural contexts.

4.2 The role of ideology

Within my investigation of the context of Vietnamese child soldiering, the theme of communism as an important force shaping children's experience has emerged. My analysis therefore has highlighted the importance of wider political ideology in interacting with existing sociocultural practices and therefore shaping the child soldiers' actions. Yet, as I have outlined in my literature review and conceptual framework chapters, this, so far, has been an under-studied factor in understanding child soldiers' (and childhood) experience.

My findings stress that political ideology is best approached not only as a prescription of institutions and strategies, but as a normative structure which aids socialisation, motivation, and maintains morale, among fulfilling other functions (this is in line with Sanin & Wood, 2014). The responses of my interviewees demonstrate that ideology is a *social practice* which merges (sometimes as part of a deliberate strategy of social engineering) with existing sociocultural practices and becomes internalised as part of an individual's habitus. As a result, ideology is so normalised that its practices are taken for granted as unquestionably true. This is shown, as I have highlighted above, in instances of Vietnamese children volunteering to take up arms as a result of mass mobilisation, propaganda, and sentiments of injustice while explicitly articulating their motivations as non-political and non-ideological. Later, as they joined the guerrillas, they received more formal ideological education. Ideology still shaped their actions and what they perceived as desirable and possible in the aftermath of the war. The role of ideology, then, cannot be ignored when analysing the experiences of child soldiers.

There is still much space for investigating the role and effect of ideology on child soldiering. As Wood and Sanin (2014) observed, this is an under-researched topic in civil war studies in general; the same also holds true for the literature on child soldiering in particular. This is because, as I have noted in Introduction, the contemporary study of conflicts in which child soldiering is often studied falls within the paradigm of the 'new wars', which does not regard ideology as a primary driver of social action (see Malesevic, 2008 for the analysis of the position of ideology within the 'new war' paradigm). Yet, if we go beyond the limited number of cases which are typically researched in the child soldier literature canon, we can gain more insight these under-studied factors. Doing so requires shifting our attention to 'old wars' which, although not so strongly associated with child soldiers, nevertheless have also had young combatants volunteer, fight, and support the struggle. I have already highlighted some examples of authors who have called for closer investigation of how political ideology shapes sociocultural practices surrounding childhood. See, for example, Kurochenko (2011), who shows that Soviet children were exposed to intense Stalinist propaganda which upheld patriotism from family, school, mass media. Multiple sources obsessively disseminated the values of civic duty and loyalty to the Motherland. Yet, she still notes that '…despite the many books written on the subject of the Soviet-German war, the story of these children eluded systematic investigation, either in the Soviet Union or outside of it' precisely because Soviet historians tend to downplay the 'social factor', including cultural practices and ideology (Kurochenko, 2011, p. 4). Similarly, Özerdem, Podder, and Quitoriano (2010, p. 305) have explicitly stated that there needs to be more research into how taking up arms is a 'natural progression in social existence', and how both ideology and sociocultural practices affect potential young recruits.

The lessons we can learn about the impact of ideology on child soldiering pertain not just to old wars, but also to 'new wars'. For example, jihadist groups display a similar dedication to ideology, which in turn has been shown to become a part of their everyday practices, including toilet habits, cooking, or sports. Yet, Hegghammer (2017) further noted that the rituals observed by jihadist groups do not steer far from ordinary Muslim ones. He then explains this counter-intuitive finding: in not sacrificing their cultural authenticity, jihadist groups make themselves easier to join because potential recruits do not have to give up their own religious background. These findings are yet to be applied explicitly to jihadist child soldiers; however, other hints of how jihadist ideology affect the notions of childhood are articulated by Pokalova (2019, p. 197), who stated that 'children are not exempt from defensive jihad which is an individual duty "upon the Muslims close by, where the children will march forth without the permission of the parents, the

wife without the permission of her husband."' Again, then, here we see interweaving of culture and ideology, which together affect everyday practices and children's own conceptions of themselves. Understanding these practices deeper, in turn, helps to also gain insights into why children, for example, volunteer to fight and to be suicide bombers; why they choose to stay and how they can be 'unmade'.

Overall, then, studying ideology – an already under-researched factor in military conflicts – presents useful insights into the reasons why (and the ways in which) children take up arms. A focus on ideology shifts our attention to 'old wars', where the presence of children is empirically significant, but severely under-studied. In addition, the insights are applicable to cases beyond 'old wars' and help to uncover structural conditions which guide individuals in other militarised contexts.

5. Limitations

My findings should be considered in light of the following limitations. The first is the limited sample of my interviewees. The issue of access presented itself early on in my research. I have managed to access a specific population to gather my interviews. While I have set out to gain an understanding of what it means to be a child soldier in Vietnam, all of my interviewees grew up as peasant children from Vietnam's ethnic Kinh majority. Being from peasant backgrounds, they present a general picture of a peasant-led movement. However, many other populations are known to have participated in the wars as children, such as ethnic minority or urban children. I have not been able to record these experiences. Yet, their accounts are likely to be different from those of children whom I interviewed: for example, urban children were less likely to be expected to participate in child labour, while children from ethnic minorities had an additional difficulty of surmounting language and cultural barriers when they joined guerrillas. Findings with regards to these populations would also illuminate how children were treated if they came from the background which was not majorly represented in the guerrilla movement. In turn, it can provide more nuanced insight into the experience of childhoods in guerrilla groups, e.g., for children who had to face an additional layer of marginalisation due to them being a minority in an armed group.

In addition, I only interviewed people who volunteered and stayed in the guerrilla groups; however, as interviews conducted by Leites (1969) or Carrier and Thomson (1966) point out,

there were some instances of coerced recruitment and desertions. For people who experienced this, working with guerrillas was likely to be a much more difficult experience. Yet, in Vietnam, the issue of deserting is considered to be shameful, thus making many people reluctant to speak about it. While this thesis, then, provided an account of an under-studied case of child soldiering, there are, however, still layers to the phenomenon, even within Vietnam itself, which I could not access.

Further, the population I collected interviews from were already adults by the time wars ended. Many of the debates surrounding child soldiers were relevant to them – e.g., the psychological impact of participating in the war or the absence of presence of educational opportunities. Nevertheless, this thesis does not cover the specifics of children's experience post-war, e.g., whether they were still considered and expected to be political, or how it impacted their subsequent education.

6. Concluding notes

The child soldiering phenomenon is not new – from wars in ancient Greece to conflicts in the 21st century, children have constituted a significant military presence in a variety of roles. The phenomenon of child soldiering, most likely, will not disappear soon. Therefore, to borrow Denov's wording, to understand how to 'unmake' occurrences of child soldiering, there needs to be an understanding of how, precisely, child soldiers are 'made'. Doing so necessitates a serious consideration of their context and personal history.

Yet, little is still known about children's experience in war and their own perspectives of this experience, particularly with regards to conflicts which are not typically associated with child soldiering – historical, anticolonial struggles in Asia being one such case. The Vietnamese conflicts have been discussed perhaps more extensively than many other conflicts occurring in Southeast Asia, laying the grounds for some of the most well-known theories and research on insurgency participation. However, even with this wealth of research and discussions on Vietnamese insurgency participation, there is a surprising silence on the roles, experiences, and positions children occupied in military conflicts in Vietnam – even though the phenomenon is widely known in Vietnam, and sometimes briefly acknowledged in Western scholarship.

My research has shown that former child soldiers from under-studied conflicts still have much to say. Their accounts can provide valuable insight on how the ongoing militarisation of everyday life, sociocultural practices, and wider political context can predispose and shape the child soldier experience. They also highlight that children are active and deeply political actors. Acknowledging their role will help in uncovering the multiplicity of childhoods – and therefore aid in understanding the processes of becoming, and 'unbecoming' a child soldier.

References

Aarseth H., Layton L., & Nielsen, H.B. 'Conflicts in the habitus: the emotional work of becoming modern', in *The Sociological Review Vol 64,* No 1 (2016), pp. 148-165

Abu Bakar, N.R.H., & Abdullah, M.Y.H. 'The life history approach: fieldwork experience', *in e-Bangi, Vol 3*, No 1 (2008), pp. 1-9

Acero, C., & Thomson, F. '"Everything peasants do is illegal": Colombian coca growers' everyday experiences of law enforcement and its impacts on state legitimacy', in *Third World Quarterly* (2021), pp. 1-19

Adams, M. 'Hybridizing habitus and reflexivity: towards an understanding of contemporary identity?', in *Sociology Vol 40*, No 3 (2006), pp. 511-528

Adorno, T., Frenkel-Brunswik, E., Levinson, D.J., & Sanford, R.N. 1950. *The Authoritarian Personality.* (London: Verno, 2019)

Ahlness, E.A. 'Post-war, peri-youth: physical and social remnants of the Tajik civil war in childhood environments', in *Childhood Vol 27*, No 3 (2020), pp. 340-353

Akello, G., Richters, A., & Reis, R. 'Reintegration of former child soldiers in northern Uganda: Coming to terms with children's agency and accountability', in *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work & Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict Vol 4,* No 3 (2006), pp. 229–242

Alexander, K. 'Agency and emotion work', in *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures Vol 7*, No 2 (2016), pp. 120-128

Alcock, S. 'Playing with rules around routines: children making mealtimes meaningful and enjoyable', *Early Years Vol 27*, No 3 (2007), pp. 281-293

Althusser, L*. Psychoanalysis and the Human Sciences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996)

Anderson, G.O., & Silano, R.A. *After action report: Operations New Life/New Arrivals, US Army support to the Indochinese refugee program, 1 April 1975 – 1 June 1976* (Washington, DC: Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, 1977)

Anderson, M., Arnsten, M., & Averch, H. *Insurgent Organization and Operations: a Case Study of the Viet Cong in the Delta, 1964-1966* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1967)

Anglin, M.K. 'Feminist perspectives on structural violence', in *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power Vol 5*, No 2 (1998), pp. 145-151

Annan, J., Brier, M., & Aryemo, F. 'From "Rebel" to "Returnee": daily life and reintegration for young soldiers in Northern Uganda', in *Journal of Adolescent Research Vol* 24, No 6 (2009), pp. 639-667

Appy, C.G. *Working-class War: American Combat Soldiers and Vietnam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993)

Arjona, A., Kasfir, N., & Mampilly, Z*. Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Arnett, G. '*Votes for 16- and 17-year-olds – where else outside Scotland?*', *The Guardian*, 18 June 2015 [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/datablog/2015/jun/18/votes-for-16--and-17-year-olds-where-else-outside-scotland> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Asselin, P*. Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954-1965* (Berkley: University of California Press, 2013)

Atkinson, A. 'Chinese communist strategic thought', in *The RUSI Journal Vol 118,* No 1 (1973), pp. 60-64

Audin, J. 'Civic duty, moral responsibility, and reciprocity: an ethnographic study on resident-volunteers in the neighbourhoods of Beijing', in *China Perspectives Vol 3* (2017), pp. 47-56

Bac Lien Youth Union (2012). *Thiếu nhi Việt Nam góp phần xây dựng và bảo vệ Tổ Quốc Việt Nam xã hội chủ nghĩa (1975 - 1986*) [Vietnamese children contribute to building and defending Vietnamese socialist homeland (1975 - 1986)] [online] Available at: <https://td.baclieu.gov.vn> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Bac, B. (2020) *Nữ tướng duy nhất của Quân đội cách mạng Việt Nam* [The only female general of the Vietnamese Revolutionary Army] [online] Available at: <https://thanhnien.vn/thoi-su/nu-tuong-duy-nhat-cua-quan-doi-cach-mang-viet-nam-1172605.html > [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Bahari, S. F. 'Qualitative versus quantitative research strategies: contrasting epistemological and ontological assumptions', in *Jurnal Teknologi Vol 52, No 1 (*2012)*, pp. 17-28*

Baird, A.D.S. *'Negotiating pathways to manhood: Violence reproduction in Medellin's periphery. Exploring habitus and masculinity to explain young men's decisions to join armed groups in poor urban neighbourhoods of Colombia'.* PhD Thesis. (University of Bradford, 2011)

Bakonyi, J., & De Guevara, B.B. A *Micro-Sociology of Violence: Deciphering patterns and dynamics of collective violence* (Oxon: Routledge, 2012)

Bao, B.K. (2013*). Tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh về đạo đức cách mạng, cần, kiệm, liêm, chính, chí công vô tư*. [Ho Chi Minh's thoughts on revolutionary ethics, need, thrifty, integrity, righteousness, and impartiality] [online] Available at: <http://dl.ueb.vnu.edu.vn/handle/1247/15743> [Assessed 19 September 2020]

Barbieri, M., & Bélanger, D. *Reconfiguring Families in Contemporary Vietnam* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006)

Barnitz, L., Path, H., & Catalla, R.F. (2001). *Cambodia: Pol Pot's Legacy of Violence* [online] Available at: <http://yapi.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/report-cambodia1.pdf> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Barstad, K. 'Preventing the recruitment of child soldiers: the ICRC approach', in *Refugee Survey Quarterly Vol 27,* No 4 (2009), pp. 142-149

Baškarada, S. 'Qualitative case study guidelines', in *The Qualitative Report Vol 19,* No 40 (2014), pp. 1-18

Beah, I. *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (London: Harper Collins, 2007)

Beck, P. A., & Jennings, M. 'Family traditions, political periods, and the development of partisan orientations', in *The Journal of Politics Vol 53,* No 3 (1991), pp. 742-763

Beck, P. A., & Jennings, M. K. 'Pathways to participation', in *American Political Science Review Vol 76,* No 1 (1982), pp. 94–108

Becker, J. 'Child recruitment in Burma, Sri Lanka and Nepal', in Gates, S., & Reich, S. (eds). *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), pp. 108-120

Beier, J.M. 'Introduction: everyday zones of militarization', in Beier, J.M. (ed). *The Militarization of Childhood: Thinking Beyond the Global South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 1-16

Beier, J. M. 'Children, childhoods, and security studies: an introduction', in *Critical Studies on Security Vol 3,* No 1 (2015), pp. 1-13

Beier, J.M. 'Introduction: making sense of childhood in International Relations', in J.M. (ed). *Discovering Childhood in International Relations* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 1-20

Beier, J.M., & Tabak, J. 'Children, childhoods, and everyday militarisms', in *Childhood Vol 27*, No 3 (2020), pp. 281-193

Benson, R., & Neveu, E. *Bourdieu and the Journalistic Field* (Polity Press: Cambridge, 2005)

Berents, H. '"No child's play: recognising the agency of former child soldiers in peace building processes"', in *Dialogue Vol 6,* No 2 (2009)

Berlan, A. 'Social sustainability in agriculture: an anthropological perspective on child labour in cocoa production in Ghana', in *Journal of Development Studies Vol 49,* No 8 (2013), pp. 1088-1100

Bernal, V. 'Equality to die for?: women guerrilla fighters and Eritrea's cultural revolution', in *Political and Legal Anthropology Review Vol 23,* No 2 (2000), pp. 61–76

Bernath, J. '"Complex political victims" in the aftermath of mass atrocity: reflections on the Khmer Rouge tribunal in Cambodia', in *International Journal of Transitional Justice Vol 10*, No 1 (2015), pp. 46–66

Bertaux, D. *Biography and Society: the Life History Approach in the Social Sciences* (California: SAGE, 1981)

Binh Phuoc. (2018). "Thập ác" thời xưa ['Ten evils' of the past] [online] Available at: < https://baobinhphuoc.com.vn/news/376/116853/thap-ac-thoi-xua> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Blattman, C., & Annan, J. 'Child combatants in Northern Uganda: reintegration myths and realities', in Muggah, R (ed.) *Security and Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Dealing with Fighters in the Aftermath of War* (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 103–126

Bondarouk, T., & Ruel, H. 'Discourse analysis: making complex methodology simple'. European Conference on Information Systems Proceedings (2004).

Boothby, N. 'What happens when child soldiers grow up? The Mozambique case study', in *Intervention: International Journal of Mental Health, Psychosocial Work & Counselling in Areas of Armed Conflict Vol 4, No* 3(2006), pp. 244–259

Bordo, S. *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture, and the Body* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993)

Borton, L., & Ryder, P.R. 'Working in a Vietnamese voice', in *The Academy of Management Executive Vol 14*, No 4 (2000), pp. 20-31

Borzello, A. 'The challenge of DDR in Northern Uganda: The Lord's Resistance Army', in *Conflict, Security & Development Vol 7,* No 3 (2007), pp. 387-415

Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D. *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992)

Bourdieu, P. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1986)

Bourdieu, P. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990)

Bourdieu, P. 'Intellectual field and creative project', in *Social Science Information Vol 8*, No 2 (1969), pp. 89–119

Bourdieu, P. *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991)

Bourdieu, P. *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977)

Bourdieu, P. *Pascalian Meditations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000)

Bourdieu, P. *Practical Reason: on Theory of Action* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998)

Bourdieu, P. *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (London: SAGE, 1977)

Bourdieu, P. *Sociology in Question* (London: SAGE, 1993)

Bourdieu, P. 'Systems of education and systems of thought', in: M.F.D. Young (Ed.) *Knowledge and Control: New Directions in the Sociology of Education* (London, Collier-Macmillan, 1971).

Bourdieu, P. *The Logic of practice* (Cambridge: Polity, 1992)

Bourdieu, P. 'Understanding', in *Theory, Culture, & Society: Explorations in Critical Social Science Vol 13*, No 2 (1996), pp. 17-37

Bourdieu, P. 'Making the economic habitus: Algerian workers revisited', in *Ethnography Vol 1*, No 1 (2000), pp. 17-41

Bourdieu, P. 'What makes a social class? On the theoretical and practical existence of groups', in *Berkeley Journal of Sociology Vol 32* (1987), pp. 1-17

Boyden J. 'Children's experience of conflict related emergencies: some implications for relief policy and practice', in *Disasters Vol 18*, No 3 (1994), pp. 254-67

Boyden, J. 'Children, war and world disorder in the 21st century: a review of the theories and the literature on children's contributions to armed violence', in *Conflict, Security & Development Vol 7,* No 2 (2007), pp. 255-27

Boyden, J. 'The Moral development of child soldiers: what do adults have to fear?', in *Peace and Conflict Vol 9,* No 4 (2003), pp. 343-362

Bradley, M.P. 'Setting the stage: Vietnamese revolutionary Nationalism and the first Vietnam war', in Anderson, D.L. (ed.). *Columbia History of the Vietnam war* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 93–119

Bradley, M.P. *Vietnam at War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

Brady, G., Lowe, P. & Lauritzen, S.O. 'Connecting a sociology of childhood perspective with the study of child health, illness and wellbeing', in *Sociology of Health and Illness Vol 37,* No 2 (2015), pp. 173-183

Brenner, D. *Rebel Politics: a Political Sociology of Armed Struggle In Myanmar's Borderlands* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2019)

Brenner, D., & Han, E. 'Forgotten Conflicts: producing knowledge and ignorance in Security Studies', in *Journal of Global Security Studies Vol 7*, No 1 (2022), pp. 1-17

Briggs, J. *Innocents Lost: When Child Soldiers Go to War* (New York: Basic Books, 2005)

Brigham, R.K. 'Vietnam society at war', in Anderson, D.L. (ed.). *Columbia History of the Vietnam War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), pp. 317–333

Human Rights Education Institute of Burma. (2008). *Forgotten future: children affected by armed conflict in Burma.* [online] Available at: <https://www1.essex.ac.uk/armedcon/story_id/ childrenandarmedconburma.pdf>

Brocklehurst, H. 'The state of play: securities of childhood – insecurities of children', in *Critical Studies on Security Vol 3,* No 1 (2015), pp. 29-46

Brown, M., & Zasloff, J.J. *Apprentice Revolutionaries: The Communist Movement in Laos, 1930– 1985* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, Stanford University, 1986).

Bryant, J. 'Communism, poverty, and demographic change in North Vietnam', in *Population and Development Review Vol 24*, No 2 (1998), pp. 235-269

Bui, N.G. 'The Confucian foundations of Ho Chi Minh's vision of the government/胡志明政治思想中的儒學基礎', in *Journal of Oriental Studies Vol 46,* No 1 (2013), pp. 35-59

Bultmann, D. 'Analyzing the Cambodian insurgency as a social field', in *Small Wars & Insurgencies Vol 25,* No 2 (2014), pp. 457-478

Bultmann, D. *Inside Cambodian insurgency: a sociological perspective on civil wars and conflict* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2015)

Bultmann, D. 'The social structure of armed groups. Reproduction and change during and after conflict', in *Small Wars & Insurgencies Vol 29*, No 4 (2018), pp. 607-628

Burr, R. 'The complexity of morality: Being a 'good child' in Vietnam?', in *Journal of Moral Education Vol 43*, No 2 (2014), pp. 156-168

Burr, R. *Vietnam's Children in a Changing World* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2006)

Busetto, L., Wick, W. & Gumbinger, C. 'How to use and assess qualitative research methods', in *Neurological Research and Practice Vol 2*, No 14 (2020), pp. 1-10

Camacho, A.Z.V. 'Family, child labour and migration: child domestic workers in Metro Manila', in *Childhood Vol 6,* No 1 (1999), pp. 57–73

Cambodian Association of Illinois and the Jewish Federation of Metropolitan Chicago. (2000). *Children of the Holocaust, Children of The Killing Fields* [online] Available at: <http://www.mekong.net/cambodia/children.htm>

Campbell, A., Converse, E.P., Miller, W.P., & Stokes, D.E. *The American Voter* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980)

Campbell, C. (2013). *Life of the Land* [online] Available at: <http://world.time.com/2013/10/31/life-of-the-land/>

Campbell, S. "What is qualitative research?", in *American Society for Clinical Laboratory Science Vol 27,* No 1 (2014), p. 3

Campos, C.F.S., Heap, S.H., & de Leon, F.L.L. 'The political influence of peer groups: experimental evidence in the classroom', in *Oxford Economic Papers Vol 69,* No 4 (2017), pp. 963–985

Caplan, P. *African Voices, African Lives: Personal Narratives from a Swahili Village* (London: Routledge, 1997)

Carrier, J.M., & Thomson, C.A.H. *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale: The Special Case of Chieu Hoi* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1966)

Carter, J.M. *Inventing Vietnam: The United States and State Building in Southeast Asia, 1954 - 1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012)

Caruso, M. 'Literacy and suffrage: the politicisation of schooling in postcolonial Hispanic America (1810–1850)', *in Paedagogica Historica Vol 46,* No 4 (2010), pp. 463–478

Carver, G.A. 'The Faceless Viet Cong', in *Foreign Affairs Vol 44*, No 3 (1966), pp. 347-372

Cary, C.D. 'Peer groups in the political socialiastion of Soviet schoolchildren', in *Social Science Quarterly Vol 55,* No. 2 (1974), pp. 451-461

Castaneda, C. *Figurations: Child, Bodies, Worlds* (Duke Universit Press, 2002)

Castelli, B. 'The lifting of the trade embargo between the United States and Vietnam: the loss of a potential bargaining tool or a means of fostering cooperation?', in *Penn State International Law Review Vol 13*, No 2 (1995), pp. 297 – 328

Cavazzoni, F., Fiorini, A., Sousa, C., & Veronese, G. 'Agency operating within structures: A qualitative exploration of agency amongst children living in Palestine', *in Childhood Vol 28*, No 3 (2021), pp. 363-379

Chakraborty, A. 'Child Soldiers in India — *A* Case of Continuing Indifference', in *Indian Human Rights Law Review Vol 5*, No 1 (2014), pp. 1-13

Chen, K. *Comparative Study of Child Soldiering on Myanmar-China Border: Evolutions, Challenges and Countermeasures* (Singapore: Springer, 2014)

Cheng, S.K.K. 'Understanding the culture and behaviour of East Asians — a Confucian perspective', in *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry Vol 24,* No 4 (1990), pp. 510–515

Child Soldiers International. (2001). *Child Soldiers Global Report 2001 - Cambodia* [online] Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4988060bc.html#_ftn332> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Child Soldiers International. (2012). *Louder Than Words: an Agenda for Action to End State Use of Child Soldiers*. [online] Available at: <https://www.child-soldiers.org/Handlers/Download.ashx?IDMF=da92581e-7130-40e6-bf3a-a86b944f17dd> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Child Soldiers International (2015). *Southern Thailand: Ongoing recruitment and use of children by armed groups* [online] Available at: <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/library/southern-thailand-ongoing-recruitment-and-use-children-armed-groups> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Christensen, P., & James, A. *Research with Children Perspectives and Practices* (London: Routledge, 2017)

Goscha, C.E. 'Hell in a very small place' Cold War and decolonisation in the assault on the Vietnamese body at Dien Bien Phu', in *European Journal of East Asian Studies Vol 9,* No 2 (2010), pp. 201-223

Clegg S., Pina e Cunha M., Rego A. 'To the victors go the spoils! Distributed agencies, inhumanities and the case of Comrade Duch of the Khmer Rouge', in de Vaujany F.X., & Mitev,

N. (eds). *Materiality and Space. Technology, Work and Globalization* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 216-239.

Colletta, N.J. & Cullen, M. L. *Violent Conflict and the Transformation of Social Capital: Lessons from Cambodia, Rwanda, Guatemala, and Somalia.* (Washington: The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 2000)

Conley, M.C. 'Communist thought and Viet Cong tactics', in *Asian Survey Vol 8,* No 3 (1968), pp. 206–222

Cooke, I. n.d. 'Children's experiences and propaganda'. British Library [online] Available at: <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/childrens-experiences-and-propaganda>

Cooley, A.L. *The Viet Cong soldier: his strengths, weaknesses and vulnerabilities.* Master's thesis (Leavenworth: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 1966)

Cortes, L. & Buchanan, M.J. 'The experience of Columbian child soldiers from a resilience perspective', in *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling Vol 29,* No 1 (2007), pp. 43–55

Coulter, C. 'Female fighters in the Sierra Leone War: Challenging the assumptions?', in *Feminist Review No 88* (2008), pp. 54-73

Council of Ministers. (1974). *Quyết định về sắp xếp việc làm cho những người có khả năng làm việc* [Decision about employment arrangements for people who are able to work]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Lao-dong-Tien-luong/Quyet-dinh-201-CP-sap-xep-viec-lam-cho-nhung-nguoi-co-kha-nang-lam-viec-22454.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Csernatoni R.O. 'The praxis of Romania's Euro-Atlantic security field: A Bourdieu-inspired research agenda', in: Kurowska X., & Breuer F. (eds). *Explaining the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012)

Cultural Survival, 1987. *Between A Rock and A Hard Place - Left-Wing Revolution, Right Wing Reaction and the Destruction of Indigenous People* [online] Available at: <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/between-rock-and-hard-place-left-wing-revolution-right> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Cunha, M.P., Clegg, S., & Rego, A. 'The ethical speaking of objects: ethics and the 'objective' world of Khmer Rouge young comrades', in *Journal of Political Power Vol 7*, No 1 (2014), pp. 35-61

D'Costa, B., Huynh, K., & Lee-Koo, K. 'Introduction', in Huynh, K., D'Costa, B., & Lee-Koo, K. (eds). *Children and Global Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 1-32

Dallaire, R. *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children: The Global Quest to Eradicate the Use of Child Soldiers* (Hutchinson: London, 2010)

Dam, Q. *Nho Giáo Xưa Và Nay* [Confucianism in past and present] (Hanoi: Nhà Xuất Bản Văn Hóa Thông Tin, 1999)

Dang, T. D. 'Post-1975 land reform in Southern Vietnam: how local actions and responses affected national land policy', in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* Vol 5, No 3 (2010), pp. 72–105

Dang, T.D. *Vietnam's Post-1975 Agrarian Reforms: How Local Politics Derailed Socialist Agriculture in Southern Vietnam* (Acton: ANU Press, 2018)

Davidson, W.P. *Some Observations on Viet Cong Operations in the Villages* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1968)

Davidson, W.P., & Zasloff, J.J. *A Profile of Viet Cong Cadres* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1966)

Davies, N. 'Vietnam 40 years on: how a communist victory gave way to capitalist corruption', *The Guardian*, 22 April 2015 [online] Available at: <www.theguardian.com/news/2015/apr/22/vietnam-40-years-on-how-communist-victory-gave-way-to-capitalist-corruption> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Dean, J. 'Class diversity and youth volunteering in the United Kingdom: applying Bourdieu's habitus and cultural capital', in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly Vol 45*, No 1 (2016), pp. 95S-113S

Delano, D. L., & Knottnerus, J. D. 'The Khmer Rouge, ritual and control', in *Asian Journal of Social Science Vol 46*, No 1-2 (2018), pp. 79–110

Denov, M. & Maclure, R. 'Turnings and epiphanies: militarization, life histories, and the making and unmaking of two child soldiers in Sierra Leone', in *Journal of Youth Studies Vol 10*, No 2 (2007), pp. 243-261

Denov, M. *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Denov, M. 'Social navigation and power in post-conflict Sierra Leone: reflections from a former child soldier turned bike rider', in Özerdem, A., & Podder, S. (eds). *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 191-213

Denov, M., & Marchand, I. '"One cannot take away the stain": Rejection and stigma among former child soldiers in Colombia', in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology Vol 20,* No *3* (2014), pp. 227–240

Denton, F.H. *Volunteers for the Viet Cong* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1968)

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y. S. 'Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research', in Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), pp. 1-21

Doan, L.G. (2009). *Nho giáo Nhật Bản và Nho giáo Việt Nam* [Confucianism in Japan and Vietnam] [online] Available at: <http://khoavanhoc-ngonngu.edu.vn/home/index.php?option=com_content&view=article &id=352:nho-giao-nht-bn-va-nho-giao-vit-nam&catid=72:hi-ngh-khoa-hc-han-nom&Itemid=146> [Assessed 19 September 2020]

Dong, D.N., & Pham, T.N. 'Tư tưởng dân vận Hồ Chí Minh trong tác phẩm "Dân vận" và vấn đề đặt ra đối với công tác dân vận hiện nay' [Ho Chi Minh's ideology in people mobilization and the problem posed to the work of the people today], in *Tạp chí Lý luận chính trị CAND* [Journal of People's Public Security Political Sciences] 23 September 2019 [online] Available at: <http://hvctcand.edu.vn/chong-dien-bien-hoa-binh/tu-tuong-dan-van-ho-chi-minh-trong-tac-pham-dan-van-va-van-de-dat-ra-doi-voi-cong-tac-dan-van-hien-nay-993> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Donnell, J.C. *Viet Cong Recruitment: Why and How Men Join* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1967)

Donnell, J.C., Pauker, G.J., & Zasloff, J.J. *Viet Cong Motivation and Morale in 1964: Preliminary Report* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1965)

Draper, A. K. "The principles and application of qualitative research," in *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society, Cambridge University Press Vol 63,* No 4 (2004), pp. 641–646

Dror, O. 'Love, hatred, and heroism: socializing children in North Vietnam during wartime, 1965–75', in *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth Vol 9*, No 3 (2016), pp. 424-449

Drumbl, M.A. *Reimagining Child Soldiers in International Law and Policy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012a)

Drumbl, M.A. (2012b). *Kony 2012: Clicktivism and Child Soldiering* [online] Available at: <http://opiniojuris.org/2012/04/20/kony-2012-clicktivism-and-child-soldiering/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Duiker, W.J. *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam*. 2nd edition (New York: Westview Press, 2018)

Dybdahl, R., & Hundeide, K. 'Childhood in the Somali context: Mothers' and children's ideas about childhood and parenthood', in *Psychology and Developing Societies Vol 10,* No 2 (1998), pp. 132–145

Eick, C.J. 'Studying career science teachers' personal histories: a methodology for understanding intrinsic reasons for career choice and retention', in *Research in Science Education Vol 32,* No 3 (2002), pp. 353–372

Elliott, D.W.P., & Elliott, M. *Documents of an Elite Viet Cong Delta Unit: the Demolition Platoon of The 514th Battalion – Part Four: Political Indoctrination and Military Training* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1969)

Emirbayer, M. 'Manifesto for a relational sociology', in *American Journal of Sociology Vol 103,* No 2 (1997), pp. 281-317

Ensor, M.O. 'Child soldiers and youth citizens in South Sudan's armed conflict', *in Peace Review Vol 24*, No 3 (2012), pp. 276-283

Erickson, F. 'A History of qualitative inquiry in social and educational research', in Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds). *SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2018), pp. 87-122

Farrar-Hockley, A. 'A reminiscence of the Chinese people's volunteers in the Korean War', in *The China Quarterly No 98* (1984), pp. 287-304

Fernando, J. 'Children's rights: beyond the impasse', in *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science Vol 575* (2001), pp. 8-24

Fforde, A. 'Contemporary Vietnam: political opportunities, conservative formal politics, and patterns of radical change', in *Asian Politics & Policy Vol 3*, No 2 (2011), pp.165-184

Flammer, P. 'Communist propaganda in South Vietnam', in *Brigham Young University Studies Quarterly Vol 13,* No 2 (1973), pp. 206-213

Fleetwood, J. 'Narrative habitus: Thinking through structure/agency in the narratives of offenders', in *Crime, Media, Culture Vol 12*, No 2 (2016), pp. 173–192

Foust, M.A. 'Loyalty in the teachings of Confucius and Josiah Royce', in *Journal of Chinese Philosophy Vol 39,* No 2 (2012), pp. 192-206

Franco, F., & Chand, S.V.S. 'Ideology as social practice: the functioning of Varna', in *Economic and Political Weekly Vol 24*, No 47 (1989), pp. 2601–2612

Freire, P. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1970)

Fries, C.J. 'Bourdieu's reflexive sociology as a theoretical basis for mixed methods research: an application to complementary and alternative medicine', in *Journal of Mixed Methods Research Vol 3*, No 4 (2009), pp.326-348

Fung, H., & Thu, M.T. 'Cultivating affection-laden hierarchy: embodied moral socialization of vòng tay (khoanh tay) with children in Southern Vietnam', in *Ethos Vol 47* No 3 (2019), pp. 281–306

Gabriel, N. 'growing up in society – a historical social psychology of childhood', in *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung Vol 42*, No 4 (2017), pp. 207-226

Gabriel, N. *The Sociology of Early Childhood: Critical Perspectives* (London: SAGE, 2017)

Gabriner, A., & Rothman, L. '"Who is the Enemy Here?" The Vietnam war pictures that moved them most'. *TIME* (n.d.) [online] Available at: <https://time.com/vietnam-photos/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Gallacher, L. 'The terrible twos': gaining control in the nursery?', in *Children's Geographies Vol 3,* No 2 (2005), pp. 243–264

Gallup, J.L. *The Economic Value of Children In Vietnam.* Paper presented at the A Seminar on Aging, Development, and Population (Institutes of Economics and Sociology, Hanoi, 1995)

Gates, S. 'Membership matters: Coerced recruits and rebel allegiance', in *Journal of Peace Research Vol 54*, No 5 (2017), pp. 674-686

Gates, S. 'Why do children fight? Motivations and the mode of recruitment', in Alpaslan, O., & Podder, S. (eds). *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 29-50

.

Gawthorpe, A. *To Build as Well as Destroy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018)

Gee, J.P. *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (New York: Routledge, 2014)

Geertz, C. The Interpretation of Cultures (London: Fontana Press, 1993)

Gelling, L. 'Qualitative research', in *Nursing Standard Vol 29,* No 30 (2015), pp. 43-47

Gerrans, P. 'Tacit knowledge, rule following and Pierre Bourdieu's philosophy of social science', in *Anthropological Theory Vol 5,* No 1, pp. 53–74

Gerring, J. 'What Is a case study and what is it good for?', in *American Political Science Review Vol 98*, No 2 (2004), pp. 341-354

Gibbs, G.R. *Analyzing Qualitative Data* (London: SAGE, 2007)

Gleason, M. 'Avoiding the agency trap: caveats for historians of children, youth, and education', in *History of Education Vol 45*, No 4 (2016), pp. 446-459

Goscha, C. 'A 'total war' of decolonization? Social mobilization and state-building in communist Vietnam (1949–54)', in *War & Society Vol 31*, No 2 (2012), pp. 136-162

Government (1975). *Thông tư hướng dẫn hoàn thành việc khen thưởng gia đình quân nhân chống Mỹ, cứu nước* [Circulars guiding rewarding families of military members who participated in stopping America, liberating the country] Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Van-hoa-Xa-hoi/Thong-tu-297-TTg-huong-dan-hoan-thanh-khen-thuong-gia-dinh-quan-nhan-chong-My-cuu-nuoc-23377.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Green, E. 'Women doing friendship': an analysis of women's leisure as a site of identity construction, empowerment and resistance', in *Leisure Studies Vol 17*, No 3 (1998), pp. 171-185

Grenfell, M. 'Applying Bourdieu's field theory: the case of social capital and education', in *Education, Knowledge and Economy* Vol 3, No 1 (2009), pp. 17-34

Grenfell, M., & James, D. 'Language and the Classroom', in Grenfell, M., & James, D. (eds). Bourdieu and Education: Acts of Practical Theory (London: Falmer Press, 1998), pp. 89-104

Grice, F. *The Myth of Mao Zedong and Modern Insurgency* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Grosse, I. 'Gender values in Vietnam — between Confucianism, Communism, and modernization', in *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding* Vol 3, No 2 (2015), pp. 253–272

Guillemot, F. 'Death and suffering at first hand: Youth Shock Brigades during the Vietnam War (1950–1975)', in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies Vol 4*, No 3 (2009), pp. 17-60

Haer, R. 'Children and armed conflict: looking at the future and learning from the past', in *Third World Quarterly Vol 40,* No 1 (2019), pp. 74-91

Haer, R., & Bohmelt, T. 'Child soldiers as time bombs? Adolescents' participation in rebel groups and the recurrence of armed conflict', in *European Journal of International Relations Vol 22,* No 2 (2015), pp. 408-436

Halai, N. 'Making use of bilingual interview data: Some experiences from the field', in *The Qualitative Report Vol 12*, No 3 (2007), pp. 344-355

Halberstam, D. *Ho.* (New York: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007)

Han, K.H. 'The feeling of "face" in Confucian society: from a perspective of psychosocial equilibrium', in *Frontiers in psychology Vol 7,* No 1055 (2016), pp. 1-9

Harding, J. *Qualitative Data Analysis: From Start to Finish* (London: SAGE, 2019)

Hardman, C. 'Can there be an Anthropology of Children?', in *Childhood Vol 8,* No 4 (2001), pp. 501-517

Hart, J. 'The politics of child soldiers', in *The Brown Journal of World Affairs Vol 13*, No 1 (2006), pp. 217-226

Hart, J. (2006). 'Saving children: what role for anthropology?', in *Anthropology Today Vol 22*, No 1, pp. 5–8

Harvie, C., & Tran, V.H. *Vietnam's Reforms and Economic Growth* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997)

Hegghammer, T. 'Non-military practices in Jihadi Groups', in Hegghammer, T. (ed). *Jihadi Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 171-202

Hellman, J. 'The role of ideology in peasant politics: peasant mobilization and demobilization in the Laguna region', in *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs Vol 25*, No 1 (1983), pp. 3-29

Henriques, J., Holloway, W., Urwin, C. *Changing the Subject: Psychology, Social Regulation and Subjectivity* (London: Methuen, 1984)

Heppner, K., & Human Rights Watch. *"My Gun was as Tall as Me": Child Soldiers in Burma* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 2002)

Hesse-Biber, S., & Leavy, P. *The Practice of Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2011)

Higgins, K. M. 'Loyalty from a Confucian perspective', in *Nomos Vol 54* (2013), pp. 22-38

Hilgers, M., & Mangez, E. *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields: Concepts and Applications* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015)

Hill, M., & Tisdall, K. *Children and Society* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014)

Him, C. *When Broken Glass Floats: Growing Up Under the Khmer Rouge* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).

Hirschman, C., & Vu, M.L. 'Family and household structure in Vietnam: some glimpses from a recent survey', in *Pacific Affairs Vol 69*, No 2 (1996), pp. 229-249

Hitchens, C. *Arguably: Essays by Christopher Hitchens* (Atlantic Books: London, 2011)

Hoang, T.L. 'Đạo hiếu trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay' [Filial Piety in Vietnamese modern families], in *Tạp chí Khoa học xã hội Việt Nam* [Journal of Vietnamese Science and Society] *Vol 10*, No 83 (2014), pp. 70-76

Hoang, T.T. 'Ảnh hưởng của quan niệm đạo đức Nho giáo đến đời sống đạo đức ở Việt Nam hiện nay' [Influence of Confucian ethics on the moral life in Vietnam today], in *Khoa Hoc Xã Hôi Viêt Nam* [Science and Society in Vietnam] *Vol 7* (2017), pp. 9-17

Hoang, T.T., & Hoang, T.K.O. 'Vietnam Confucianism - Some General Specialties', in *World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Vol 6,* No 2 (2020), pp. 45-50

Ho Chi Minh with children's performance troupe (1950). [online] Available at: <https://vnanet.vn/vi/anh/anh-chuyen-de-1053/ky-niem-78-nam-ngay-thanh-lap-doi-thieu-nien-tien-phong-ho-chi-minh-1551941--1552019-3870052.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Hodal, K. 2015. 'Did they survive?': children of the Vietnam war, 50 years on. *The Guardian,* 28 February 2015 [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/feb/28/vietnam-child-evacuees-photographs-50-years-on> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Hoffman, D. 'Like beast in the bush: synonyms of childhood and youth in Sierra Leone,' in *Postcolonial studies Vol 6,* No 3 (2003), pp. 295-308

Hoffman, K. 'The moral economy of Mai Mai governance', in Arjona, A., Kasfir, N., Mampilly, Z. (eds). *Rebel Governance in Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 158-179

Holstein, J., & Gubrium, J.F. *Inside Interviewing: New Lenses, New Concerns* (California: SAGE, 2003)

Honeck, M. (2019). *Youth Organizations* [online] Available at: <http://docupedia.de/zg/Honeck_youth_organizations_v1_en_2019> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Honwana, A. 'Children in war: reintegrating child soldiers', in *IDS Bulletin Vol 40*, No 1 (2009), pp. 63–68

Honwana, A. 'Innocent and guilty: child soldiers as interstitial and tactical agents', in A. Honwana & F. de Boeck. (eds). *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005) pp. 31–52

Honwana, A. *Child Soldiers in Africa* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania press, 2006)

Howell, A. 'Making war work: resilience, emotional fitness, and affective economies in Western militaries', in Ahall, L., & Gregory, T. (eds). *Emotions, Politics and War* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015)

Huijsmans, R. 'Children working beyond their localities: Lao children working in Thailand', in *Childhood Vol 15,* No 3 (2008), pp. 331–353

Huijsmans, R. 'Critical geopolitics of child and youth migration in (post)socialist Laos', in Benwell, M.C., & Hopkins, P (eds). *Children, Young People and Critical Geopolitics* (Oxon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 139-154

Huijsmans, R., & Baker, S. 'Child Trafficking: 'Worst form' of child labour, or worst approach to young migrants?', in *Development and Change Vol 43*, No 4 (2012), pp. 919-946

Human Rights Watch. (2007). *Sold to Be Soldiers: The Recruitment and Use of Child Soldiers in Burma* [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2007/10/31/sold-be-soldiers/recruitment-and-use-child-soldiers-burma> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Human Rights Watch. (2008). *Coercion and Intimidation of Child Soldiers to Participate in Violence* [online] Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2008/04/16/coercion-and-intimidation-child-soldiers-participate-violence> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Huong Thuy People's Committee. (n.d). *Hương Thủy trong kháng chiến chống Mỹ: Đấu tranh chống kế hoạch bình định của địch* [Huong Thuy in the war against the US: Fighting the enemy's pacification plan] [online] Assessed at: < https://huongthuy.thuathienhue.gov.vn/?gd=17&cn=2 92&tc=2590> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Husu, H. M. 'Bourdieu and social movements: considering identity movements in terms of field, capital and habitus', in *Social Movement Studies Vol 2,* No 3 (2013), pp. 264-279

Hutchison, J.N., & Douglas, E.P. *Interview with Douglas Eugene Pike.* Feb 1, 1989. Manuscript/Mixed Material. Available at: <https://www.loc.gov/item/mfdipbib000931/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Huynh, K. 'Child soldiers: causes, solutions and cultures', in Huynh, K., D'Costa, B., & Lee-Koo, K. (eds). *Children and Global Conflict* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 123-157

Huynh, K.K. 'The Vietnamese Communist movement revisited', in *Southeast Asian Affairs*, (1976), pp. 445–466

Hwang, K. K. & Han, K.H. 'Face and morality in Confucian society', in Bond, M.H. (eds) *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 479-498

Hynd, S. 'Small warriors? Children and youth in colonial insurgencies and counterinsurgency, ca. 1945–1960', in *Comparative Studies in Society and History Vol 62*, No 4 (2020), pp. 684-713

Jackson, R.L., Drummond, D.K., & Camara, S. "What is qualitative research?", in *Qualitative Research Reports in Communication Vol 8,* No 1 (2007), pp. 21-28

Jacob, C. '"Children and armed conflict" and the field of Security Studies', in *Critical Studies on Security Vol 3*, No 1 (2015), pp. 14-28

Jacob, C. *Child Security in Asia: The Impact of Armed Conflict in Cambodia and Myanmar* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014)

James, A., & Prout, A. 'A new paradigm for the sociology of childhood? Provenance, promise, and problems', in *Constructing and Reconstructing Childhood: Contemporary Issues in the Sociological Study of Childhood* (London: Routledge, 1997)

Jamieson, N.L. *Understanding Vietnam* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1995)

Janesick, V.J. 'Oral history, life history, and biography'*,* in Trainor, A.A. & Graue, E. (eds). *Reviewing Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 151-166

Janoski, T., Musick, M., & Wilson, J. 'Being volunteered? The impact of social participation and pro-social attitudes on volunteering', in *Sociological Forum Vol 13,* No 3 (1998), pp. 495-519

Jeffrey, C. 'Geographies of children and youth II: Global youth agency', in *Progress in Human Geography Vol 36*, No 2 (2012), pp. 245–253

Jenkins, R. *Pierre Bourdieu* (London: Routledge, 2014)

Jennings, M.K., & Niemi, R.G. 'The transmission of political values from parent to child', in *American Political Science Review Vol 62*, No 1 (1968), pp. 169–184

Joes, A.J. *The War for South Viet Nam, 1954-1975* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2001)

Johnson, C. 'The third generation of guerrilla warfare', in *Asian Survey Vol 8*, No 6 (1968), pp. 435-447

Jordans, M.J., Komproe, I.H., Tol, W.A., Ndayisaba, A., Nisabwe T., & Kohrt, B. 'Reintegration of child soldiers in Burundi: a tracer study', in *Biomed Central Public Health Vol 12*, No 905 (2012), pp. 1-12

Kallio, K. P., & Häkli J., 'Are there politics in childhood?', in *Space & Polity Vol 15,* No 1 (2011), pp. 21-34

Kallio, K.P 'The body as a battlefield: approaching children's politics', in *Geografiska Annaler: Series B, Human Geography Vol 90*, No 3 (2008), pp. 285–297

Kallio, K.P. 'Becoming geopolitical in the everyday world', in Benwell, M.C., & Hopkins, P. (eds). *Children, Young People and Critical Geopolitics (*Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 169–187

Kalman, B. *Vietnam: The People* (New York: Crabtree Publishing Company, 2002)

Kampan, P., & Tanielian, R.A. 'Securing the future of the community: child protection in ASEAN', in *Asian Social Science Vol 10,* No 11 (2014), pp. 172-184

Kanagaratnam P., Raundalen, M., & Asbjørnsen, A.E. 'Ideological commitment and posttraumatic stress in former Tamil child soldiers', in *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology Vol 46,* No 6 (2005), pp. 511-520

Kanavou, A. A., & Path, K. 'The social adaptation of Khmer Rouge perpetrators in the aftermath of the Cambodian genocide', in *Asian Journal of Social Science Vol 48*, No 5-6 (2020), pp. 535–566

Kar, S. 'An obituary for innocence: revisiting the trauma during the Khmer Rouge years in Cambodia through children's narratives', in *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities Vol 12*, No 2 (2020), pp. 1-9

Kawulich, B., & Chilisa, B. 'Selecting a research approach: Paradigm, methodology, and methods', in Wagner, C., Kawulich, B., & Garner, M. (eds). *Doing Social Research: a Global Context* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2012), pp. 51–61

Keightley, E. 'Remembering research: memory and methodology in the social sciences', in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology Vol 13,* No 1 (2010), pp. 55–70

Kelley, L. '"Confucianism" in Vietnam: a state of the field essay', in *Journal of Vietnamese Studies* Vol 1, No 1-2 (2006), pp. 314-370

Kenway, J., & McLeod, J. 'Bourdieu's reflexive sociology and 'spaces of points of view': whose reflexivity, which perspective?', in *British Journal of Sociology of Education Vol 25*, No 4 (2004), pp. 525-544

Kerkvliet, B.J.T. *The Power of Everyday Politics: How Vietnamese Peasants Transformed National Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005)

Khalili, K. 'Gendered practices of counterinsurgency', in *Review of International Studies Vol 37*, No 4 (2011), pp. 1471-1491

Khanh, N. 'Hội Cựu thanh niên xung phong phát huy vai trò, hiệu quả hoạt động' [The Association of Youth Shock Brigades promotes its role and effectiveness]. *Phu Tho,* 7 August 2020 [online] Available at: <http://baophutho.vn/xa-hoi/202008/hoi-cuu-thanh-nien-xung-phong-phat-huy-vai-tro-hieu-qua-hoat-dong-172351> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Khuat, T.H. 'Stem family in Vietnam', in Fauve-Chamoux, A. & Ochiai, E. (eds). *The Stem Family in Eurasian Perspective: Revisiting House Societies, 17th-20th Centuries* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009)

Kids in Vinh City Children's Camp in Nghe An province welcome President Ho Chi Minh (1967). [online] Available at: <https://en.cand.com.vn/law-society/Uncle-Ho-and-his-great-love-for-children-i523177/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Kiernan, B. 'Introduction: a world turned upside down', in Pran, D., & DePaul, K. (eds). *Children of Cambodia's Killing Fields* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), pp. xi-1

King, A. 'Thinking with Bourdieu against Bourdieu: a 'practical' critique of the habitus', in *Sociological Theory Vol 18,* No 3 (2000), pp. 417–433

King, A.Y.C., & Bond, M.H. 'The Confucian paradigm of man: a sociological view', in Tseng, W.S., Wu, D.Y.H. (eds). *Chinese Culture and Mental Health* (London: Academic Press, 1985), pp. 29–45

Kleinen, J. *Facing the Future, Reviving the Past: A Study of Social Change in a Northern Vietnamese Village* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1999)

Klemensits, P. & Czirjak, R. 'Child soldiers in genocidal regimes: the cases of the Khmer Rouge and the Hutu power', in *Academic and Applied Research in Military Science Vol* 15, No (2016), pp. 215-222

Kolko, G. 'Vietnam since 1975: Winning a war and losing the peace', *in Journal of Contemporary Asia Vol 25,* No 1 (1995), pp. 3–49

Korf, B., Fünfgeld, H. 'War and the commons: Assessing the changing politics of violence, access and entitlements in Sri Lanka', in *Geoforum Vol 37,* No 3 (2006), pp. 391–403

Kryger, L., & Lindgren, C. 'Fighting for a future: the potential for posttraumatic growth among youths formerly associated with armed forces in Northern Uganda', in *Intervention Vol 9,* No 1 (2011), pp. 6–20

Kurochenko, O. *Little Soldiers: How Soviet Children Went to War, 1941-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)

Lacouture, J., & Cunneen, J.E. 'The "Viet Cong', in *CrossCurrents Vol 15,* No 3 (1965), pp. 355–362

Lai, H. (2019). 'Chủ nghĩa cá nhân làm con người ta xuống dốc không phanh' [Individualism makes people go downhill]. *Voice of Vietnam* [online] Available at: <https://vov.vn/chinh-tri/dang/chu-nghia-ca-nhan-lam-con-nguoi-ta-xuong-doc-khong-phanh-874100.vov>   [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Lancy, D.F. *Anthropological Perspectives on Children as Helpers, Workers, Artisans, and Laborers* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017)

Lancy, D.F. 'Unmasking Children's Agency', in *Sociology, Social Work and Anthropology Faculty Publications.* Paper 277 (2012)

Lancy, D.F. *Raising Children: Surprising Insights from Other Cultures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

Lancy, D.F. *The Anthropology of Childhood: Cherubs, Chattel, Changelings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

Langer, P.F., & Zasloff, J.J. *Revolution in Laos: The North Vietnamese And The Pathet Lao* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1969)

Langer, P.F. *Education in the Communist Zone of Laos* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1971)

Langton, K. 'Peer group and school and the political socialization process', in *The American Political Science Review Vol 61*, No 3 (1967), pp. 751-758

Lanning, M., & Cragg, D. *Inside the VC and the NVA: The Real Story of North Vietnam's Armed Forces* (Texas: Texas University Press, 2008)

Lapadat, J.C., & Lindsay, A.C. 'Transcription in research and practice: from standardization of technique to interpretive positionings', in *Qualitative Inquiry Vol 5*, No 1 (1999), pp.64-86

Latham, M. 'Redirecting the revolution? The USA and the failure of nation-building in South Vietnam', in *Third World Quarterly Vol 27,* No 1 (2006), pp. 27-41

Lau, R.W.K. 'Habitus and the Practical Logic of Practice', in *Sociology Vol 38*, No 2 (2004), pp. 369-387

Lazenby, J.F. *The Spartan Army*. (South Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military, 2012)

Le, C.P. (2005). *Phong trào phụ nữ "Ba đảm đang", một mốc son lịch sử chói lọi* ['Women's movement "Three responsibilities", a shining milestone] [online] Available at: <https://nhandan.com.vn/tin-tuc-su-kien/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Le, M. (2015). *Thanh niên xung phong quên mình vì Tổ quốc* ['Youth volunteers forget themselves for the Motherland] <online> Available at: <https://nhandan.com.vn/chinhtri/thanh-nien-xung-phong-quen-minh-vi-to-quoc-230928/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Le, T.B.T. 'Vietnamese family culture in the context of international integration', in *World Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Vol 4,* No 3 (2018), pp. 170-176

Le, T.Q. (2013) *Những giá trị truyền thống và hiện đại cần phát huy trong gia đình Việt Nam hiện nay* [The traditional and modern values worthy of promoting in the Vietnamese family today] [online] Available at: <http://tapchicongsan.org.vn/web/guest/nghien-cu/-/2018/21833/nhung-gia-tri-truyen-thong-va-hien-dai-can-phat-huy-trong-gia-dinh-viet-nam-hien-nay.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Le, V.V. 'Vietnamese re-education camps: do they violate both traditional and modern vietnamese criminal law', in *Arizona Journal of International and Comparative Law Vol 11,* No 1 (1994), pp. 145-180

Leaney, S. 'Habitus as foregrounded history: theorising affect in the social formation of embodied practice', in *British Journal of Sociology of Education Vol 40,* No 2 (2019), pp. 207-221

Lee, A.J. 'Understanding and addressing the phenomenon of 'child soldiers': the gap between the global humanitarian discourse and the local understandings and experiences of young people's military recruitment'. *Refugee Studies Centre working papers no 52* (Oxford: Refugee Studies Centre, 2009) [online] Available at: <https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/files/publications/working-paper-series/wp52-understanding-addressing-child-soldiers-2009.pdf> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Leichty, M.M. 'Family attitudes and self-concept in Vietnamese and U.S. children', in *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry Vol 33*, No 1 (1963), pp. 38-50

Leites, N. *The Viet Cong Style of Politics* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1969)

Lessard, M. 'I die because of my circumstances': Nguyen Thi Giang and the Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang', in Blackburn, S., & Ting, H. (eds). *Women in Southeast Asian Nationalist Movements* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2013)

Levey, E.J, Oppenheim, C.E., Lange, B.C.L., Plasky, N.S., Harris, B.L., Lekpeh, G.G., Kekulah, I., Henderson, D.C., & Borba, C.P.C. 'A qualitative analysis of factors impacting resilience among youth in post-conflict Liberia', in *Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and Mental Health Vol 10,* No 1 (2016), pp. 10-26

Lewy, G. *America in Vietnam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978)

Libarkin., J.C., & Kurdziel, J.P. 'Research Methodologies in science education: the qualitative-quantitative debate', in *Journal of Geoscience Education Vol 50,* No 1 (2002), pp. 78-86

Liebel, M. 'Children without childhood? Against the postcolonial capture of childhoods in the Global South', in Invernizzi, A., Liebel, M., Milne, B., Budde, R. (eds). *Children Out of Place' and Human Rights: In Memory of Judith Ennew* (Switzerland: Springer, 2017), pp. 79-99

Liebes, T., & Ribak, R. 'The contribution of family culture to political participation, political outlook, and its reproduction', in *Communication Research Vol 19*, No 5 (1992), pp. 618–641

Linden, A., & Klandermans, B. 'Revolutionaries, wanderers, converts, and compliants: life histories of extreme right activists', in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography Vol 36,* No 2 (2007), pp. 184–201

Lippiello, T. 'Measuring human relations', in Lippiello, T., Yuehong, C., & Barenghi, M. (eds). *Linking Ancient and Contemporary: Continuities and Discontinuities in Chinese Literature* (Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari, 2016), pp. 23-40

Liu, A.Y.C. 'Children at work: do regions matter and why? A case study in Vietnam', in *Asia Pacific School of Economics and Management Working Papers* (Asia Pacific Press, 2000)

Logevall, F. *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York: Random House, 2012)

Lopes, P. 'Pierre Bourdieu's fields of cultural production: A Case Study of Modern Jazz', in Brown, N. & Szeman, I. (eds). *Pierre Bourdieu: Fieldwork in Culture* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), pp. 165-186

Lowicki, J., & Emry, M. (2005). 'Youth Speak Out: New Voices on the Protection and Participation of Young People Affected by Armed Conflict'. *New York: Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children.* [online] available at: <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/images/zdocs/cap_ysofinal_rev.pdf> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Lu, Y.H. 'Shame and the Confucian Idea of Yi (Righteousness)', in *International philosophical quarterly Vol 58,* No 1 (2018), pp. 5-18

Ludtke, A. *Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Luong, H.V. 'Wealth, power, and inequality: global market, the state, and local sociocultural dynamics', in Luong, V.H. (ed). *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society* (Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), pp. 81-106

Ly, Q.H., & Nguyen, T.N. (2016). 'Tư tưởng Hồ Chí Minh về giải phóng phụ nữ và vấn đề nâng cao vị trí, vai trò của phụ nữ trong xã hội ngày nay' [Ho Chi Minh's thoughts on women's liberation and the issue of enhancing the position and role of women in today's society]. *The Communist Magazine.* [online] Available at: <https://www.tapchicongsan.org.vn/van_hoa_xa_hoi/-/2018/40905/tu-tuong-ho-chi-minh-ve-giai-phong-phu-nu-va-van-de-nang-cao-vi-tri%2C-vai-tro-cua-phu-nu-trong-xa-hoi-ngay-nay.aspx#> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Ma, V.K. *Mãi mãi một thời Thiếu sinh quân* [Forever a cadet] (Hanoi: Kim Dong, 2019)

MacDonald, A. '"New wars: Forgotten warriors": Why have girl fighters been excluded from Western representations of conflict in Sierra Leone?', in *Africa Development Vol XXXIII,* No 3 (2008*),* pp. 135–145

Mach, Q.T. 'President Ho Chi Minh's 'Mass Mobilisation': theoretical and practical value', in *National Defense Journal*. 15 October 2019. [online] Available at:< http://tapchiqptd.vn/en/events-and-comments/president-ho-chi-minhs-mass-mobilisation-theoretical-and-practical-value/14507.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Machel, G. *The Impact of War on Children* (London: Hurst & Company, 2001)

MacLean, L.M., Meyer, M., & Estable, A. 'Improving accuracy of transcripts in qualitative research', in *Qualitative Health Research, Vol 14* No 1, (2004), pp. 113-123

Madhok, S., & and Rai, S.M, 'Agency, injury, and transgressive politics in neoliberal times', in *Signs Vol 37,* No 3 (2012), pp. 645–69

Madsen, R. 'Confucian conceptions of civil society', in. Chambers, S., & Kymlicka, (eds). *Alternate Conceptions of Civil Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), p. 191-206

Mai, V.H. 'Gia đình, dòng họ và thôn làng với tư cách là các giá trị cơ bản của văn hoá người Việt' [Families, lineages and villages as fundamental values of Vietnamese culture], in *Xã hội học* [Sociology] *Vol 1* (2009), pp. 36-40

Malarney, S. 'The realities and consequences of war in a Northern Vietnamese commune', in Malarney, Young, M. B., & Buzzanco, R. (eds). *A Companion to the Vietnam War*. (Malden: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 65-78

Malarney, S.K. *Culture, Ritual and Revolution in Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002)

Malik, A.N. 'Mapping children's play and violence in Kashmir', in *Childhood Vol 27*, No 3 (2000), pp.354-368

Malešević, S. 'The Sociology of New Wars? Assessing the Causes and Objectives of Contemporary Violent Conflicts', in *International Political Sociology Vol 2*, No 2 (2008), pp. 97–112

Man, S. *Soldiering Through Empire: Race and the Making of the Decolonizing Pacific* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018)

Mannion, G. 'Going spatial, going relational: Why "listening to children" and children's participation needs reframing', in *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education Vol 28*, No 3 (2007), pp. 405-420

Maranto, R., & Tuchman, P. 'Knowing the rational peasant: the creation of rival incentive structures in Vietnam', in *Journal of Peace Research Vol 29*, No 3 (1992), pp. 249-264

Maringira G, Gibson, D., & Richters A. '"It's in my blood": the military habitus of former Zimbabwean soldiers in exile in South Africa', in *Armed Forces & Society Vol 41*, No 1 (2015), pp. 23-42

Maringira, G., & Carrasco, L.N. '"Once a soldier, a soldier forever": exiled Zimbabwean soldiers in South Africa', in *Medical Anthropology Vol 34*, No 4 (2015), pp. 319-335

Marr, D.G. 'Concepts of 'Individual' and 'Self' in twentieth-century Vietnam', in *Modern Asian Studies Vol 34*, No 4 (2000), pp. 769-796

Marr, D.G. *Vietnam: State, War, and Revolution (1945–1946)* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013)

Marshall, D.J. 'Save (us from) the children: trauma, Palestinian childhood, and the production of governable subjects', in *Children's Geographies Vol 12,* No 3 (2014), pp. 281 – 296

Martins, C. '"How many people have you killed?" Child-Soldiers in literature and film', in *Cahiers D'études Africaines Vol 211* (2013), pp. 649-675

Mason, J., & Tipper, B. 'Being related', in *Childhood Vol 15*, No 4 (2008), pp. 441–460

Matthews, H., & Gardiner, H. *The Changing Geography of the UK* (London: Routledge, 2002)

Matthews, H., Limb, M. & Taylor, M. 'Young people's participation and representation in society', in *Geoforum Vol 30*, No 2 (1999), pp.135-144

Mayall, B. *Towards a Sociology of Childhood*. (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2002)

Maynes, M.J. 'Age as a category of historical analysis: history, agency, and narratives of childhood', in *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth Vol 1*, No 1 (2008), pp. 114-124

McCoy, A. W. 'America's secret war in Laos, 1955-1975', in Young, M.B., Buzzanco, R. (eds). *A Companion to the Vietnam War* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002), pp. 283-315

McCullin, D. (n.d.) *U.S. corpsman carrying an injured child away from the battle in Hue*. [online] Available at: < https://time.com/vietnam-photos/>

McDonough, P. 'Habitus and the practice of public service', in *Work, Employment and Society Vol 20,* No 4 (2006), pp. 629-647

McHale, S.F. *Print and Power: Confucianism, Communism, and Buddhism in the Making of Modern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004)

McLeod, J. 'Why we interview now -- reflexivity and perspective in a longitudinal study', in *International Journal of Social Research Methodology Vol 6*, No 3 (2003), pp. 201-211

McMullin, J. 'Reintegrating young combatants: do child-centred approaches leave children—and adults—behind?', in *Third World Quarterly Vol 32*, No 4 (2011), pp. 743-764

McRobbie, A. 'A mixed bag of misfortunes? Bourdieu's Weight of the World', in *Theory, Culture & Society Vol 19*, No 3 (2002), pp. 129-138

Mekonnen, D.R., & van Reisen, M. 'The EU Lisbon Treaty and EU Development Cooperation: Considerations for a Revised EU Strategy on Development Cooperation in Eritrea', in *Verfassung Und Recht in Übersee / Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, Vol *45,* No 3 (2012), pp. 324–343

Merriam, S.B., & Tisdell, E.J*. Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation* (San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, 2015)

Merridale, C. 'Masculinity at war: Did gender matter in the Soviet army?', in *Journal of War & Culture Studies Vol 5*, No 3 (2012), pp. 307-320

Metelits, C.M. 'Bourdieu's capital and insurgent group resilience: a field-theoretic approach to the polisario front', in *Small Wars & Insurgencies Vol 29*, No 4 (2018), pp. 680-708

Milam, R. *The Vietnam War in Popular Culture: The Influence of America's Most Controversial War on Everyday Life. Volume 1: During the war* (Colorado: Praeger, 2016)

Mills, M.B. 'Contesting the margins of modernity: women, migration, and consumption in Thailand', in *American Ethnologist Vol 24,* No 1 (1997), pp. 37-61

Ministry of Finance (1976). *Thông tư hướng dẫn việc tiếp nhận, trả lương, sinh hoạt phí hoặc trợ cấp cho cán bộ, học sinh, quân nhân chuyển ngành được chuyển từ miền Nam ra miền Bắc* [Circulars guiding the receipt, payment of salaries, living expenses or allowances for cadres, students and military personnel transferred from the South to the North]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Lao-dong-Tien-luong/Thong-Tu-12-TC_HCVX-Huong-dan-tiep-nhan-tra-luong-sinh-hoat-phi-hoac-tro-cap-can-bo-hoc-sinh-quan-nhan-chuyen-nganh-tu-mien-Nam-ra-Bac-53901.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Ministry of Labour (1972). *Thông tư Giải thích và hướng dẫn thi hành điều lệnh về nghĩa vụ lao động trong thời chiến ban hành kèm theo Nghị định số 117-cp ngày 13-6-1972 của Hội đồng Chính phủ* [Circulars explaining and guiding on the implementation of the War Order of Labor Obligation issued together with Decree No. 117-cp dated June 13, 1972 of the Cabinet of Ministers]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Lao-dong-Tien-luong/Thong-tu-10-LD-TT-Dieu-lenh-nghia-vu-lao-dong-thoi-chien-huong-dan-Nghi-dinh-117-CP-18975.aspx>> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Ministry of Labour (1975). *Thông tư của bộ lao động số 04-lđ/tt ngày 15 tháng 2 năm 1975 hướng dẫn việc đăng ký lao động cho công dân trong tuổi lao động, cấp thẻ lao động cho công dân đang có việc làm* [Circulars of the ministry of labor no.04-lđ / tt dated February 15, 1975 guiding labour registration for workers of working age, issue of labour cards to citizens who are working]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Lao-dong-Tien-luong/Thong-tu-04-LD-TT-huong-dan-dang-ky-lao-dong-cong-dan-tuoi-lao-dong-cap-the-cong-dan-co-viec-lam-44684.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Ministry of Public Security – Ministry of Labour (1974). *Thông tư liên bộ lao động - công an số 12/ ttlb ngày 24 tháng 3 năm 1975 hướng dẫn thi hành chế độ bắt buộc lao động theo quyết định số 201/cp ngày 30-8-1974 của Hội đồng Chính phủ* [Circulars: The Ministry of Labour - public security no.12 / ttlb March 24, 1975 guiding the implementation of compulsory labour regime under decision no. 201 / cp dated August 30, 1974 of the Cabinet of Ministers]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Lao-dong-Tien-luong/Thong-tu-12-TTLB-huong-dan-che-do-bat-buoc-lao-dong-Quyet-dinh-201-Cp-44674.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Minns, D.R., & Williams, C.B. 'Agent influence on political learning: an experimental study', in *The Social Science Journal Vol 26,* No 2 (1989), pp. 173–188

Mohajan, H.K. 'Qualitative research methodology in social sciences and related subjects', in *Journal of Economic Development, Environment and People Vol 7*, No 1 (2018), pp. 23-48

Mosse, G. *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991)

Moynagh, M. 'Political futurity and the child-soldier figure', in *Interventions Vol 16,* No 5 (2013), pp. 655–674

Mugadza, H.T., Mujeyi, B., Stout, B., Wali, N., & Renzaho, A.M.N. 'Childrearing practices among Sub-Saharan African Migrants in Australia: a systematic review', in *Journal of Child and Family Studies Vol 28* (2019), pp. 2927–2941

Muldoon, O.T., & Wilson, K. 'Ideological commitment, experience of conflict and adjustment in Northern Irish adolescents', in *Medicine, Conflict and Survival Vol 17,* No 2 (2001), pp. 112-124

Nadel, L., & Jacobs, W.J. 'Traumatic Memory Is Special', in *Current Directions in Psychological Science Vol 7*, No 5 (1998), pp. 154-157

Nakamura, H. *The Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India-China-Tibet-Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1964)

Nakata, S. M. 'Elizabeth Eckford's appearance at Little Rock: the possibility of children's political agency', in *Politics Vol 28,* No 1 (2007), pp. 19–25

Nash, R. 'Bourdieu on education and social and cultural reproduction', in *British Journal of Sociology of Education Vol 11,* No 4 (1990), pp. 431-447

Ngo, T.L.A. & Hoang, T.T. '*Ý nghĩa của đạo hiếu đối với quan hệ gia đình ở Việt nam hiện nay*' [The significance of filial piety for family relations in Vietnam today], in *Tạp chí Khoa học & Công nghệ* [Journal of Science and Technology*] Vol 191,* No 15 (2018), pp. 9-13

Nguyen, A.C. *'A few highlights about the campaigns during Vietnam People's War'* [Vài Nét Về Nghệ Thuật Chiến Dịch Trong Chiến Tranh Nhân Dân Việt Nam], in *Ho Chi Minh University Journal of Science Vol 5*, No 38 (2014), pp. 112-115

Nguyen, H. 'When development means political maturation: adolescents as miniature communists in post-war and pre-reform Vietnam, 1975–1986', in *The History of the Family Vol 17*, No 2 (2012), pp. 256-278

Nguyen, K. 'Daily deference rituals and social hierarchy in Vietnam', in *Asian Social Science Vol 12*, No 5 (2016), pp. 34-46

Nguyen, N. 'The noble person and the revolutionary: living with Confucian Values in Contemporary Vietnam', in Ames, R.T., & Hershock, P.D. (eds). *Confucianisms for a Changing World Cultural Order* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018), pp. 128-163

Nguyen, N.H. 'The Confucian incursion into Vietnam', in Slote, W.H., & De Vos, G.A. (eds). *Confucianism and the Family: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), pp. 91-105

Nguyen, N.T. 'Confucianism and humane education in contemporary Vietnam', in *International Communication of Chinese Culture Vol 3* (2016), pp. 645–671

Nguyen, N.H.C. *South Vietnamese Soldiers*: *Memories* of the *Vietnam War and After* (Westport: Praeger, 2016)

Nguyen, T.T., & Nguyen, T.B. 'Filial piety and the implementation of taking care of elderly people in Vietnamese families at present time', in *Journal of Educational and Social Research Vol 2,* No 3 (2012), pp. 227-234

Nguyen, V.C. *Work without name: changing patterns of children's work in a Northern Vietnamese village*. PhD Thesis. (University of Amsterdam, 2000)

Nguyen, V.D. Đẩy mạnh phong trào "Cựu chiến binh giúp nhau giảm nghèo, làm kinh tế giỏi" [Pushing forward the movement of veterans helping each other to escape poverty and excel in business]. *Quốc Phòng Toàn Dân* [Journal of National Defense]. 6 December 2021. [online] Available at: http://tapchiqptd.vn/vi/bao-ve-to-quoc/day-manh-phong-trao-cuu-chien-binh-giup-nhau-giam-ngheo-lam-kinh-te-gioi/18014.html [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Ni, P. 'Gongfu - a vital dimension of Confucian teaching', in Jones, D. (ed). *Confucius Now: Contemporary Encounters with the Analects* (Illinois: Carus Publishing Company, 2015), pp. 167-189

Nije, B., & Asimiran, A. 'Case study as a choice in qualitative methodology', *in IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education Vol 4*, No 3 (2014), pp. 35-40

Noblit, G.W., & Engel, J.D. 'The holistic injunction: an ideal and a moral imperative for qualitative research', in *Counterpoints Vol 44 (*1999*)*, pp. 53–60

Nolas, S.M., Varvantakis, C., & Aruldoss, V. 'Talking politics in everyday family lives', in *Contemporary Social Science Vol 12,* No 1-2 (2017a), pp. 68-83

Nolas, S.M., Varvantakis, C., & Aruldoss, V. 'Political activism across the life course', in *Contemporary Social Science Vol 12,* No 1-2 (2017b), pp. 1-12

O'Dowd, E.C. 'Ho Chi Minh and the origins of the Vietnamese doctrine of guerrilla tactics', in *Small Wars & Insurgencies Vol 24*, No 3 (2013), pp. 561–587

Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict. (n.d.) *Child Recruitment and Use* [online] Assessed at: <https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/six-grave-violations/child-soldiers/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Office of the Secretary of Defense. *United States - Vietnam Relations, 1945 – 1967* (Pentagon Papers, 1969)

Opper, M. *People's Wars in China, Malaya, and Vietnam* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2020)

Orum, M., Feagin, J.R., Sjoberg, G. 'Introduction: the nature of the case study', in Feagin, J.R., Orum, A., & Sjoberg, G. (eds). *The Case Study* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1991), pp. 1-27

Özerdem, A., & Podder, S. 'Mapping child soldier reintegration outcomes: exploring the linkages', iin Özerdem, A., & Podder, S. (eds). *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 309-323

Özerdem, A., Podder, S., & Quitoriano, E.L. "Identity, ideology and child soldiering: community and youth participation in civil conflict – a study on the Moro Islamic Liberation Front in Mindanao, Philippines", in *Civil Wars Vol 12,* No 3 (2010), pp. 304-325

Palaganas, E.C., Sanchez, M.C., Molintas, M.P., & Caricativo, R.D. 'Reflexivity in qualitative research: a journey of learning', in *The Qualitative Report Vol 22*, No 2 (2017), pp. 426-438

Parker, E.L. 'Hungry for honor: children in violent youth gangs', in *Interpretation Vol 55,* No 2 (2001), pp. 148-160

Parkinson, S. 'Organizing rebellion: rethinking high-risk mobilization and social networks in war', in *American Political Science Review Vol 107,* No 3 (2013), pp. 418-432

Pauletto, E & Patel, P. 'Challenging child soldier DDR processes and policies in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo', in *Journal of Peace, Conflict and Development*, No 16 (2010), pp. 36-57

Pelzer, K. 'Love, war, and revolution: reflections on the memoirs of Nguyen Thi Dinh', in Werner, S., & Luu, D.H. (eds). *The Vietnam war: Vietnamese and American perspectives* (Oxon: Routledge, 2015), pp. 95-112

Pentagon Papers. Origins of the Insurgency. *MAP for Diem: The Eisenhower Commitments, 1954-1960, Vol 5.* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967)

People in Hanoi listen to radio about the "Agreement to end the war and restore peace in Vietnam" that was initialed in Paris (1973). [online] Available at: <https://vnanet.vn/vi/anh/anh-chuyen-de-1053/ky-niem-65-nam-ngay-giai-phong-thu-do-10101954---10102019-ky-uc-mot-thoi-ha-noi-4110060.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Perez, F.P. 'Voluntarism and determinism in Giddens's and Bourdieu's theories of human agency', in *Essex Graduate Journal of Sociology Vol 8* (2008), pp. 55-64

Pergande, D. 'Private voluntary aid and nation building in South Vietnam: The humanitarian politics of CARE, 1954–61', in *Peace & Change Vol 27,* No 2 (2002), pp.165-197

Perry, B. 'Case study research', in May, T. (ed). *EBOOK: Social Research* (Berkshire: McGraw-Hill Education, 2011)

Peters, K., & Richards, P. 'Why we fight: voices of youth combatants in Sierra Leone', in *Africa Vol 68,* No 2 (1998), pp. 183-210

Pettus, A. *Between Sacrifice and Desire: National Identity and the Governing of Femininity In Vietnam.* (Abington: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2004)

Pham, N. 'Confucianism and the conception of the law in Vietnam', in Gillespie, J., Nicholson, P. (eds). *Asian Socialism & Legal Change: The Dynamics of Vietnamese and Chinese Reform* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2005), pp. 76-91

Pham, T.T.A. (2018). *Khắc ghi lời Bác dạy về đoàn kết, thống nhất trong Quân đội* [Remember the teaching Uncle Ho taught about solidarity and unity in the Army] [online] Accessible at: < http://hoathanh.tanphu.hochiminhcity.gov.vn/hoc-tap-va-lam-theo-tu-tuong-dao-duc-phong-cach-ho-chi-minh/khac-ghi-loi-bac-day-ve-doan-ket-thong-nhat-trong-quan-doi-cmobile312-2671.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Pham, V.B. *The Vietnamese Family in Change: The case of the Red River Delta* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999)

Phan, D.D. *Làng Việt Nam đa nguyên và chặt* [Villages in Vietnam: Plurality and closeness] (Hanoi: National Publishing House, 2006).

Phan, D.T. (2008). '*Trị "kẻ bất hiếu" ra sao'?* [How to deal with unfilial people?] [online] Available at: <ttps://plo.vn/ban-doc/tri-ke-bat-hieu-ra-sao-255875.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Phan, L.T.K. (2017). *The Impact of Vietnamese National Culture on the Effectiveness of Quality Management in Higher Education Institutions.* International Conference VNSEAMEO.

Phan, N. *Bản sắc văn hóa Việt Nam* [Cultural identity of Vietnam] (Ho Chi Minh City: Literature Publishing House, 2015).

Pholsena, V. 'Highlanders on the Ho Chi Minh Trail', in *Critical Asian Studies Vol 40*, No 3 (2008), pp. 445-474

Pholsena, V. 'The (transformative) impacts of the Vietnam War and the Communist Revolution in a border region in southeastern Laos', in *War & Society Vol 31*, No 2 (2012), pp. 163–83

Pholsena, V., 'War generation: Youth mobilization and socialization in Revolutionary Laos', in Boute, V., Pholsena, V (eds). *Changing Lives in Laos: Society, Politics and Culture in a Post-Socialist State* (Singapore: NUS Press, 2017), pp. 109-155

Phung, Q. *Tuổi thơ dữ dội* [Violent Childhood] (Ho Chi Minh City: Literature Publishing House, 1988)

Phuong, T. (2019). *Người không hát tình ca" và những câu chuyện cảm động về chiến sĩ Trường Sơn* [A person who did not sing' and touching stories about soldiers Truong Son] [online] Available at: <http://www.thiduakhenthuongvn.org.vn/dien-hinh-tien-tien/nguoi-khong-hat-tinh-ca-va-nhung-cau-chuyen-cam-dong-ve-chien-si-truong-son> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Piaget, J. 'Part I: Cognitive development in children: Piaget development and learning', in *Journal of Research in Science Teaching Vol 2,* No 3 (1964), pp. 176–186

Pike, D. *Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam* (Cambridge: M.I.T Press, 1966)

Podder, S. 'Neither child nor soldier: contested terrains in identity, victimcy, and survival', in Alpaslan, O., & Podder, S. (eds). *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp.141-159

Podder, S. 'Understanding the legitimacy of armed groups: a relational perspective', in *Small Wars & Insurgencies Vol 28,* No 4-5 (2017), pp. 686-708

Pokalova, E. *Returning Islamist Foreign Fighters: Threats and Challenges to the West* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019)

Popkin, S.L. *The Myth of the Village: Revolution and Reaction in Viet Nam*. PhD Thesis (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1963)

Popkin, S.L. *The Rational Peasant: The Political Economy of Rural Society in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California, 1979)

Power, E.M. 'Toward understanding in postmodern interview analysis: interpreting the contradictory remarks of a research participant', in *Qualitative Health Research Vol 14*, No 6 (2004), pp. 858–865

Power, E.L. 'An Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's key theoretical concepts', in *Journal for the Study of Food and Society Vol 3*, No 1 (1999), pp. 48-52

Pred, C. *Theory and Methods: Critical Essays in Human Geography* (Oxon: Routledge, 2017)

Preston, J.M. '"If they abduct you, you don't come back": understanding Ugandan former child soldiers in the context of their life', in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology Vol 21*, No 3 (2015), pp. 432–444

Prevention Action (2012). *The Power of Storytelling: Treating the Trauma of Child Soldiers* [online] Available at: <https://www.vivo.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/The_power_of_storytelling-_treating_the_trauma_of_child_soldiers___Prevention_Action.pdf> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Prime Minister (1978a). *Chỉ thị về việc tổ chức lực lượng thanh niên xung phong xây dựng kinh tế ở các tỉnh và thành phố miền Nam* [Directive on the organization of the youth volunteers for the economic construction in the Southern provinces and cities]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Van-hoa-Xa-hoi/Chi-thi-460-TTg-to-chuc-luc-luong-thanh-nien-xung-phong-xay-dung-kinh-te-tinh-thanh-pho-mien-Nam-17228.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Prime Minister (1978b). *Thông tư về việc khen thưởng những gia đình có người thân thoát ly tham gia vào hàng ngũ cách mạng* [Circular about rewarding family with emancipated family members who joined the revolutionary ranks]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Van-hoa-Xa-hoi/Thong-tu-177-BT-khen-thuong-gia-dinh-co-nguoi-than-thoat-ly-tham-gia-hang-ngu-cach-mang-55137.aspx> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Prime Minister (1980). *Chỉ thị về việc sắp xếp và sử dụng quân nhân xuất ngũ* [Directive about the arrangement and use of discharged military personnel]. Available at: <https://thuvienphapluat.vn/van-ban/Lao-dong-Tien-luong/Chi-thi-276-TTg-sap-xep-su-dung-quan-nhan-xuat-ngu-44260.aspx>

Pugel, J.B. 'Dissaggregating the causal factors unique to child soldiering in Liberia', in Gates, S., & Reich, S. (eds). *Child Soldiers in the Age of Fractured States* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009), pp. 160-182

Quinn-Judge, S. 'Women in the early Vietnamese communist movement: sex, lies, and liberation', in *South East Asia Research* Vol 9, No 1 (2001), pp.245-269

Quynh, U. (2019). *Trẻ em Việt Nam trong khói lửa chiến tranh* [Vietnamese children in the fire of war] [online] Available at: < http://baolamdong.vn/hosotulieu/201912/tre-em-viet-nam-trong-khoi-lua-chien-tranh-2977204/index.htm> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Qvortrup, J. 'Editorial: The waiting child', in *Childhood Vol 11,* No 3 (2004), pp. 267–273

Ralph, H. 'Quotations and documents: Viet Cong documents on the War (II)', in *Communist Affairs Vol 5*, No 6 (1967), pp. 22-34

Ratelle, J.F. 'Making sense of violence in civil war: challenging academic narratives through political ethnography', in *Critical Studies on Security Vol 1*, No 2 (2013), pp. 159-173

Razavi, S. 'Households, families, and social reproduction', in Waylen, G., Celis, G.K., Kantola, J., & Weldon, S.K. (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of Gender and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 289-313

Reay, D. 'Cultural Reproduction: Mothers involvement in their children's primary schooling', in M. Grenfell, & D. James (eds). *Bourdieu And Education: Acts of Practical Theory* (London: Falmer Press, 1998), pp. 72-89

Reay, D. 'It's all becoming a habitus': beyond the habitual use of habitus in educational research', in *British Journal of Sociology of Education Vol 25,* No 4 (2004), pp. 431-444

Reay, D. 'Shaun's Story: troubling discourses of white working-class masculinities', in *Gender and Education Vol 14,* No 3 (2002), pp. 221-234

Reay, D., & Vincent, C. *Theorizing Social Class and Education* (Oxon: Routledge, 2014)

Reay, D., Crozier, G. & Clayton, J. 'Strangers in paradise'? Working-class students in elite universities', in *Sociology Vol 43,* No 6 (2009), pp. 1103–112

Rivard, L. 'Child Soldiers and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programs: the universalism of children's rights vs. cultural relativism debate', in *The Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* (2010)

Robequain, C. *The Economic Development of French Indo-China* (New York: AMS Press, 1974)

Roberts, P. 'Paulo Freire and the politics of education: a response to Neumann', in *Educational Philosophy and Theory Vol 48*, No 6 (2015), pp. 645–653

Roberts, P. *Paulo Freire in The 21st Century: Education, Dialogue, and Transformation.* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2013)

Rolph, H.M. 'The Viet Cong: politics at gunpoint', in *Communist Affairs Vol 4, No* 4 (1966), pp. 3–13

Rosen, D.M. *Armies of the Young: Child Soldiers in War and Terrorism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005)

Rosen, D.M. 'Child Soldiers, International Humanitarian Law, and the Globalization of Childhood', in *American Anthropologist Vol 109,* No 2 (2007), pp. 296-306

Rosen, D.M *Child Soldiers in the Western Imagination: From Patriots to Victims* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2015)

Rosen, D.M. 'Child soldiers in historical and comparative perspective: creating a space for data-driven analysis', in Drumbl, M.A, & Barrett, J.C. (eds). *Research Handbook on Child Soldiers* (Glos: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2019), pp. 151-174

Rosenoff, L. 'A habitus of war and displacement? Bourdieu's 'third way' and rural youth in Northern Uganda after two decades of war', in *Nokoko Vol 1* (2010), pp. 49-63

Rossman, G.B., & Rallis, S.F. *Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (London: SAGE, 2003)

Rottman, G.L. *Viet Cong and NVA Tunnels and Fortifications of the Vietnam War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2006)

Rottman, G.L. *Viet Cong Fighter* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2007)

Rubin, H.J., & Rubin, I.S. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (London: SAGE, 2013)

Rydstrøm, H. 'Gendered corporeality and bare lives: Local sacrifices and sufferings during the Vietnam War', in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society Vol 37,* No 2 (2012), pp. 275-299

Rydstrøm, H. 'Sexed Bodies, gendered bodies: children and the body in Vietnam', in *Women's Studies International Forum Vol 25*, No 3 (2002), pp. 359–372

Rydstrøm, H. 'Masculinity and punishment: Men's upbringing of boys in rural Vietnam', in *Childhood Vol 13,* No 3 (2006a), pp. 329–348

Ryslostrøm, H. *Embodying Morality: Growing Up in Rural Northern Vietnam* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2006b).

Rylko-Bauer, B., & Farmer, P. 'Structural violence, poverty, and social suffering', in Brady, D., & Burton, L.M. (eds). *The Oxford Handbook of the Social Science of Poverty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 47-74

Salamca, S.N. *"I am who I am because of who I was" – Refiguring childhoods through Colombian former child soldiers' stories*. PhD Thesis. (University of Edinburgh, 2019)

Sanín F.G, & Wood E.J. "Ideology in civil war: Instrumental adoption and beyond", in *Journal of Peace Research Vol 51, No 2 (2014), pp.213-226*

Sarkesian, S., & Connor, R. *The US Military Profession into the 21st Century: War, Peace and Politics* (London: Routledge, 2006)

Schafer, J.C. 'The collective and the individual in two post-war Vietnamese novels', in *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies Vol 14*, No 2 (2000), pp. 13-48

Scheper-Hughes, N., Sargent, C.F. *Small Wars: The Cultural Politics of Childhood* (California: University of California Press, 1998)

Schinkel, W. 'Sociological discourse of the relational: the cases of Bourdieu & Latour', in *The Sociological Review Vol 55*, No 4 (2007), pp. 707–729

Schlichte, K. 'When "the facts" become a text reinterpreting war with Serbian war veterans', in *Revue de Synthèse Vol 135,* No 4 (2014), pp. 361–384

Schmidt, A. 'Volunteer child soldiers as reality: a development issue for Africa', in *New School Economic Review Vol 2* (2007), pp. 49-76

Schuurman, B., & Eijkman, Q. 'Moving Terrorism Research Forward: The Crucial Role of Primary Sources', in *The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism - The Hague 4 No 2 (2013), pp. 1-13*

Scollon, S. 'Political and Somatic Alignment: Habitus, Ideology and Social Practice', in Weiss, G., & Wodak, R. (eds). *Critical Discourse Analysis Theory and Interdisciplinarity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 167-198

Scott, J.C. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985)

Scott, J.C. The *Moral Economy of the Peasant* (New Heaven: Yale University Press, 1976)

Shah, A. 'The Intimacy of Insurgency: beyond coercion, greed or grievance in Maoist India', in *Economy and Society Vol 42*, No 3 (2013), pp. 480-506

Shaw, R. *Memories of the Slave Trade: Ritual and the Historical Imagination in Sierra Leone* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002)

Shek, D.T.L., Yu, L., & Fu, X. 'Confucian virtues and Chinese adolescent development: a conceptual review', in *International Journal of Adolescent Medicine and Health Vol 25, No* 4 (2013), pp. 335-344

Shepler, A. *Childhood Deployed: Remaking Child Soldiers in Sierra Leone* (New York: New York University Press, 2014)

Shils, E.A., & Janowitz, M. 'Cohesion and disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II', in *The Public Opinion Quarterly Vol 12*, No 2 (1948), pp. 280-315

Singer, P.W. *Children at War* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006)

Skelton, T. 'Taking young people as political actors seriously: opening the borders of political geography', in *Area Vol 42,* No 2 (2010), pp. 145-151

Slote, W.H. 'Destiny and determination', in Slote, W.H. & De Vos, G.A. (eds). *Confucianism and the Family: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (New York: SUNY Press, 1998), p.311-329

Smart, A. (2018) *The 14-year-old Notts boy who lied about his age to sign up for the First World War* [online] Available at: <https://www.nottinghampost.com/news/history/14-year-old-notts-boy-1996756> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Smith, D. Congo warlord Thomas Lubanga convicted of using child soldiers. *The Guardian,* 14 March 2012. [online] Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/mar/14/congo-thomas-lubanga-child-soldiers> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Söderström, J. 'The resilient, the remobilized and the removed: party mobilization among former M19 combatants', in *Civil Wars Vol 18,* No 2 (2016), pp. 214-233

Somasundaram, D. 'Child soldiers: understanding the context', *in British Medical Journal Vol 324*, No 7348 (2002), pp. 1268-1271

Southerland, D. 2006. *Child Soldiers — Driven by Fear and Hate* [online] Available at: <https://www.rfa.org/english/blog/cambodiablog/blog6_cambodia_southerland-20060720.html>

Srichampa, S. 'Vietnamese propaganda reflections from 1945-2000', in *The Mon-Khmer Studies Journal Vol 37* (2007), pp. 87-116

Stake, R.E. *The Art of Case Study Research* (London: SAGE, 1995)

Starry, G.A. *Mounted Combat in Vietnam* (Washington: Department of the Army, 2002)

Steckler, A., McLeroy, K.R., Goodman, R.M., Bird, S.T., & McCormick, L. "Toward Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods: An Introduction", in *Health Education Quarterly Vol 19, No 1 (*1992)*, pp. 1–8*

Steinl, L. *Child Soldiers as Agents of War and Peace: A Restorative Transitional Justice Approach to Accountability for Crimes Under International Law* (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2017)

Stephens, S. *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995)

Stur, H.M. *Beyond Combat: Women and Gender in the Vietnam war era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

Sturken, M. *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Los Anegeles: University of California Press, 1997)

Sung, W. 'Zhong 忠 in the Analects with Insights into Loyalty', in Ames, R.T., & Hershock, P.D. (eds). *Confucianisms for a Changing World Cultural Order* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2018), pp. 175-197

Susen, S. 'Reflections on ideology', in *Thesis Eleven Vol 124*, No 1 (2014), pp. 90–113

Sutherland, L.A., & Darnhofer, I. 'Of organic farmers and 'good farmers': changing habitus in rural England', in *Journal of Rural Studies Vol 28,* No. 3 (2012), pp. 232–240

Swartz, D*. Culture and Power: The Sociology of Pierre Bourdieu* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012)

Szymańska-Matusiewicz, G. 'The researcher as 'older sister', 'younger sister' and 'niece': playing the roles defined by the Vietnamese pronominal reference system', in *Qualitative Research Vol 14,* No 1 (2014), pp. 95-111

Tabak, J. *The Child and the World: Child-Soldiers and the Claim for Progress* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020)

Talja, S. 'Analyzing qualitative interview data: the discourse analytic method', in *Library & Information Science Research Vol 21,* No 4 (1999), pp. 459-477

Tam, T. (2020). *Những bức thư cảm động Bác Hồ gửi thiếu niên, nhi đồng* [Touching letters from Uncle Ho to children and youth] [online] Available at: <https://www.bqllang.gov.vn/tin-tuc/tin-tong-hop/9561-nhung-buc-thu-cam-dong-bac-ho-gui-thieu-nien-nhi-dong.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Tanham, G.K. *Communist Revolutionary Warfare: From the Vietminh to the Viet Cong* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2006)

Taylor, S.C. *Vietnamese Women at War: Fighting for Ho Chi Minh and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1999)

Tedin, K.L. 'The influence of parents on the political attitudes of adolescents', in *American Political Science Review Vol 68,* No 4 (1974), pp. 1579–1592

Tellis, W.M. 'Application of a case study methodology', in *The Qualitative Report Vol 3,* No 3 (1997), pp. 1-19

Thanh, H. (2013). *Phong trào thi đua ái quốc: Những lời Bác Hồ căn dặn thiếu niên, nhi đồng* [Movement of patriotism: uncle Ho's teachings to children and youth] [online] Available at: < https://www.bqllang.gov.vn/tin-tuc/tin-tu-ban-quan-ly-lang/1314-phong-trao-thi-dua-ai-qu-c-nh-ng-l-i-bac-h-can-d-n-thi-u-nien-nhi-d-ng.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Thanh, L. (2021). *Cựu chiến binh gương mẫu đi đầu* [Model veterans take the lead] [online] Available at: <http://baohaiduong.vn/lam-theo-guong-bac/cuu-chien-binh-guong-mau-di-dau-178329> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

The New York Times. (1964). *Close-up of the Vietcong in Their Jungle; A French reporter held captive by guerrillas in South Vietnam here reports on what he saw of the Vietcong—the men, their morale, their methods.* The New York Times, 13 September 1964.

Thomas, L.M. 'Historicising agency', in *Gender and History Vol 28,* No 2 (2016), pp. 324–339

Thomas, M. 'The identity politics of school life: territoriality and the racial subjectivity of teen girls in LA', in *Children's Geographies Vol 7,* No 1 (2009), pp. 7–19

Thrift, N. 'Difficult years': ideology and urbanization in South Vietnam, 1975–1986', in *Urban Geography Vol 8,* No 5 (1987), pp. 420–439

Thu, H. (2021). *Tổng kết Hội liên hiệp phụ nữ – Hội Cựu chiến binh thị trấn Chợ Chu năm 2020* [Summary Cho Chu's Women's Association – Veteran's Associations's activities in 2020] [online] Available at: <http://dinhhoa.thainguyen.gov.vn/tin-moi/-/asset_publisher/qae 6RUchMAqw/content/tong-ket-hoi-lien-hiep-phu-nu-hoi-cuu-chien-binh-thi-tran-cho-chu-nam-2020/pop_up?_101_INSTANCE_qae6RUchMAqw_viewMode=print&_101_INSTANCE_qae6R UchMAqw_languageId=vi_VN>[Assessed 23 March 2022]

Tisdall, E.K.M. & Punch, S. 'Not so 'new'?: Looking critically at Childhood Studies', in *Children's Geographies Vol 10,* No 3 (2012), pp. 249-264

Tomanovic, S. 'Family habitus as the cultural context for childhood', in *Childhood Vol 11*, No 3 (2004), pp. 339-360

Tonnesson, S. 'From Confucianism to Communism, and back?'. *Political Uses of Culture and Religion.* (Norwegian Association of Development Studies, 18-20 June, 1993)

Torney-Purta, J., & Hess, R.D. *The Development of Political Attitudes in Children* (Oxon: Routledge, 1967)

Tovy, T. 'Peasants and revolutionary movements: the Viet Cong as a case study', in *War in History Vol 17*, No 2 (2010) pp. 217-230

Trainor, A.A. 'Interview research', in Trainor, A.A. & Graue, E. (eds). *Reviewing Qualitative Research in the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 125-139

Tran, Q.T. 'Broken, but not forsaken: disabled South Vietnamese veterans in Vietnam and the Vietnamese diaspora', in Boyle, B.M., & Lim, J. (eds). *Looking Back on the Vietnam War: Twenty-first-Century Perspectives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2016), pp. 34-50

Tran, T. H. (2017). 'Hồ Chí Minh kế thừa giá trị đạo đức Nho giáo trong xây dựng đạo đức cán bộ' [Ho Chi Minh inherited the Confucian moral values in building cadres' morality], in *Tạp chí Văn Hoá Nghệ Thuật* [Journal of Culture and Arts] *Vol 400* [online] Available at:

<https://vhnt.org.vn/ho-chi-minh-ke-thua-gia-tri-dao-duc-nho-giao-trong-xay-dung-dao-duc-can-bo/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Tran, T.T.T. 'Góp thêm ý kiến về giá trị của bộ luật hồng đức' [Comments on the value of the Hong Duc law], in *Tạp chí Khoa học - Đại học Sư phạm thành phố Hồ Chí Minh* [Science Journal of Ho Chi Minh University of Pedagogy] *Vol 13* (2008), pp. 3-11

Tran, V.D. 'Confucianism: Vietnam', in Cua, A.S. (ed.) *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003)

Truong, T.D. & Hallinger, P. 'Exploring cultural context and school leadership: conceptualizing an indigenous model of có uy school leadership in Vietnam', in *International Journal of Leadership in Education Vol 20*, No 5 (2017), pp. 539-561

Turley, W.S. 'Women in the Communist revolution in Vietnam', in *Asian Survey Vol 12,* No 9 (1972), pp. 793–805

Turner, K.G. '"Vietnam" as a women's War', in Young, M.B., & Buzzanco, R. (eds). *A Companion to the Vietnam war (*Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002)

Ugarriza, J.E, & Craig, M.J. 'The Relevance of Ideology to Contemporary Armed Conflicts: A Quantitative Analysis of Former Combatants in Colombia', in *Journal of Conflict Resolution Vol 57,* No 3 (2013), pp. 445-477

UNICEF, n.d. *Children at Both Ends of the Gun* [online] Available at: <https://www.unicef.org/graca/kidsoldi.htm> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Utas, M. *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and The Liberian Civil War*. PhD Thesis. (Uppsala University, 2003)

Utas, M. 'Victimcy as social navigation: From the toolbox of Liberian child soldiers', in Özerdem, A., & Podder, S. (eds). *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 213-230

Utas, M. 'Victimcy, girlfriending, soldiering: tactic agency in a young woman's social navigation of the Liberian war zone', in *Anthropological Quarterly Vol 78,* No 2 (2005), pp. 403-430

Uttal, L. 'Liminal cultural work in family childcare: Latino immigrant family childcare providers and bicultural childrearing in the United States, 2002–2004', in *Paedagogica Historica Vol 46* (2010), pp. 729–740

Vallgårda, K., Alexander, K., & Olsen, S. (2018). *Against Agency* [online] Available at: <https://www.shcy.org/features/commentaries/against-agency/> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Van Eijck, K. 'Socialization, education, and lifestyle: How social mobility increases the cultural heterogeneity of status groups', in *Poetics Vol 26,* No 5-6 (1999), pp. 309–328

Van, T.T.M. (2019) *Di huấn Hồ Chí Minh về "cần kiệm liêm chính, chí công vô tư* [Ho Chi Minh Testament on 'Need of integrity, fairness, and impartiality'] [online] Available at: < http://tuyengiao.vn/bao-ve-nen-tang-tu-tuong-cua-dang/di-huan-ho-chi-minh-ve-can-kiem-liem-chinh-chi-cong-vo-tu-123354> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Vannak, H. *The Khmer Rouge Dicision 703: From Victory to Self-destruction* (Pnom Penh: Documentation Center of Cambodia, 2003)

Varvantakis, C., Nolas, S.M., & Aruldoss, V. 'Photography, politics and childhood: exploring children's multimodal relations with the public sphere', in *Visual Studies Vol 1,* No 15 (2019), pp. 266-280

Veale, A. From *Child Soldier to Ex-Fighter, Female Fighters, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Ethiopia* (Pretoria: Institute for Security Studies, 2003).

Veale, A., & Stavrou, A. 'Former Lord's Resistance Army child soldier abductees: Explorations of identity in reintegration and reconciliation', in *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology, Vol 13,* No 3 (2007), pp. 273–292

Velitchkova, A. 'Institutionalized behavior, morality, and domination: A Habitus in Action Model of Political Violence', in *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* (2021), pp. 1-20

Verhey, B. 'Child soldiers: preventing, demobilizing and reintegrating'. *Africa Region Working Paper Series, No. 23.* (Washington, D.C. The World Bank 2001)

Vo, N.G. (1962). *People's War, People's Army; the Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (Auckland: Pickle Partners Publishing, 2015)

Vo, T.C. (2016). *Sự du nhập và ảnh hưởng của Nho giáo đến giá trị truyền thống văn hóa Việt Nam* [The introduction and influence of Confucianism on Vietnamese cultural traditional values]

[online] Available at: <http://vanhoanghean.com.vn/component/k2/30-nhung-goc-nhin-van-hoa/11261-su-du-nhap-va-anh-huong-cua-nho-giao-den-gia-tri-truyen-thong-van-hoa-viet-nam> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

VOA Cambodia. (2009). *Former Child Soldier Describes Khmer Rouge* [online] Available at: <https://www.voacambodia.com/a/a-40-2009-09-28-voa4-90171232/1354614.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Voicu, B., & Voicu, M. 'Volunteers and volunteering in Central and Eastern Europe', in *Sociologia Vol 41* (2009) pp. 539-563

Vu, C.C. *Chúng Tôi Thời Hậu Chiến* [Us in the post-war period] (Hanoi: Labour Publishing House, 2020)

Vu, K. 'Về giá trị đương đại của Nho giáo Việt Nam' [About contemporary values of Vietnamese Confucianism], in *Tạp chí Triết học* [Journal of Philosophy] *Vol 8,* No 219 (2009) [online] Available at: <http://philosophy.vass.gov.vn/triet-hoc-vietnam/Ve-gia-tri-duong-dai-cua-Nho-giao-Viet-Nam-70.0.html> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Vue, Y. (2021). '"They raped my wife and killed my son." One child soldier remembers the secret war' [online] Available at: <https://medium.com/illumination/they-raped-my-wife-and-killed-my-son-one-child-soldier-remembers-the-secret-war-91f1e1d92d10> [Assessed 23 March 2022]

Watson, A.M.S 'Resilience is its own resistance: the place of children in post-conflict settlement', in *Critical Studies on Security Vol 3,* No 1 (2015), pp. 47-61

Watson, A.M.S. 'Children and International Relations: a new site of knowledge?', in *Review of International Studies Vol 32,* No 2 (2006), pp. 237–250

Watson, A.M.S. 'Can there be a "kindered" peace?', in *Ethics & International Affairs Vol 22,* No 1 (2008)

Watson, A.M.S. 'Guardians of the Peace?: The Significance of Children to Continued Militarism', in Beier, J.M. (ed). *The Militarization of Childhood: Thinking Beyond the Global South* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 43-61

Waugh, M.N. *Soldier Boys: The Militarisation of Australian and New Zealand Schools for World War I* (Melbourne: Melbourne Books, 2014)

Weaver, G.M. *Ideologies of Forgetting: Rape in the Vietnam War* (New York: SUNY Press, 2010)

Weiner, B. 'Review of Viet Cong: The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, by D. Pike', in *The Western Political Quarterly Vol 20,* No 2 (1967), pp. 505–507

Weist, A. *The Vietnam War 1956-1975* (New York: Routledge, 2009)

Wellard, S., & McKenna, L. 'Turning tapes into text: issues surrounding the transcription of interviews', in *Contemporary Nurse Vol 11*, No 2-3 (2001), pp. 180–186

Wessells, M.G. 'Child soldiers', in *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists Vol 53,* No 6 (1997), pp. 32-39

Wessells, M.G. *Child Soldiers: From Violence to Protection* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

West, H.G. 'Girls with guns: narrating the experience of war of Frelimo's "female detachment"', in *Anthropological Quarterly Vol 73*, No 4 (2000), pp. 180-194

Whitmore, J.K. 'Chiao-Chih and neo-Confucianism: the Ming attempt to transform Vietnam', in *Ming studies Vol 1977,* No 1 (2013), pp. 51-02

Williams, T. 'Agency, responsibility, and culpability: the complexity of roles and self-representations of perpetrators', in *Journal of Perpetrators Research Vol 2*, No 1 (2018), pp. 39-64

Winther-Lindqvist, D. 'Game playing: negotiating rules and identities', in *American Journal of Play Vol 2,* No 1 (2009), pp. 60-84

Wood, E.J. 'The social processes of civil war: the wartime transformation of social networks', in *Annual Review of Political Science Vol 11,* No 1 (2008), pp. 539-561

Woodside, A.B. 'Medieval Vietnam and Cambodia: a comparative comment', in *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies Vol 15,* No 2 (1984), pp. 315-319

Wu, Z., Zhao, R., Zhang, X., & Liu, F. 'The impact of social capital on volunteering and giving: evidence from urban China', in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly Vol 47*, No 6 (2018), pp. 1201–1222

Wyness, M. *Children and Society: An Introduction to the Sociology of Childhood*. (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006)

Wyness, M. 'Children, childhood and political participation: Case studies of young people's councils', in *International Journal of Children's Rights, Vol 9* No 3 (2001), pp. 193-212

Xuan, S. Đội thiếu niên du kích Đình Bảng [Dinh Bang's children guerrilla group] (Hanoi: Kim Dong, 2012)

Yao, X. *An Introduction to Confucianism*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)

Yilmaz, K. "Comparison of Quantitative and Qualitative Research Traditions: epistemological, theoretical, and methodological differences", in *European Journal of Education Vol 48, No 2 (*2013*), pp. 311–325*

Yin, R. *Case Study Research*. 2nd edition (Beverly Hills, CA: SAGE, 1994)

Yinusa, M., Oluyemi, J., Bashiru, S., & Abdulateef, R. 'The Family and national development: how can the family forestall future insurgency activities in the Nigerian Society?', in *Anthropological Researches and Studies Vol 1,* No 8 (2018), pp. 232-244

Yu, I.S. *Law and Society in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Vietnam* (Hanoi: Sociology Publishing House, 1994)

Yum, J.O. (1994). 'The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in East Asia', in Samovar, L.A. & Porter, R.E. (eds). *Intercultural Communication: a Reader* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1994), pp. 75-86

Yum, J.O. 'The impact of Confucianism on interpersonal relationships and communication patterns in east Asia', in *Communication Monographs Vol 55,* No 4 (1988), pp. 374–388

Zack-Williams, A.B. 'Child soldiers in the civil war in Sierra Leone', in *Review of African Political Economy Vol 28,* No 87 (2001), pp. 73-82

Zasloff, J.J. *Political Motivation of the Viet Cong: the Viet Minh Regroupees* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1968)

Zasloff, J.J. *The Pathet Lao: Leadership and Organization* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1973)

Zhao, L. & Roper, J. 'A Confucian approach to well-being and social capital development', in *Journal of Management Development Vol 30* (2011), pp. 740-752

Zheng, H. 'Childhood, education, and everyday militarism in China before and after 1949', in Beier, J.M., & Tabak, J. (eds). *Childhoods in Peace and Conflict* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), pp. 103-123

Zyck, S.T. ''But I'm a man': the imposition of childhood on and denial of identity and economic opportunity to Afghanistan's child soldiers', in: Özerdem A., & Podder S. (eds) *Child Soldiers: From Recruitment to Reintegration* (Basingtoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 159-172

Appendix A: Interviewee profiles

The Vietnam War

No	Interview date and location	Pseudonym	Pen portrait
1	19.07.2016, Hanoi	Cuong	At 17, Cuong enlisted in the Main forces as a combatant, responding to his local village's calls to 'borrow age'. He marched with his squad towards the South, enduring extreme heat and hunger, including the lack of salt and other food. After serving until the end of the war, he returned to his home village and started university studies. He described his post-war experiences as deeply complicated. On the one hand, he was happy that the war was over, but on the other, he felt the fragmentation of post-war society and missed the affection and camaraderie of guerrillas.
2	15.07.2016, Hanoi	Quan	Quan joined the Viet Cong as a sapper at 16, following the 'general spirit' of excitement that was prevalent in the North. Working as a sapper, he also recounted receiving much support from his comrades and having time to play alongside doing his missions. After returning from the war in his 20s, he was sent to train as a political officer. He then continued to work as a university teacher.
3	13.07.2016, Hanoi	Duy	Duy volunteered to be a part of the Main forces when he was 16. While he was carrying out standard combat and ambush duties, he also stood out as a reliable and responsible guerrilla. He therefore was also tasked with assisting guerrilla leaders with smaller errands. After the end of the Vietnam War, he continued his military career and participated in the Vietnamese war in Cambodia. Thanks to his long career and military achievements, he was then chosen to work for the government (details of his post-war work are left deliberately vague at the request of the interviewee).
4	19.07.2016, Hanoi	Si	Si joined the Main Forces when he was 17, with his main duty including marching to the South and support the insurgency. After being discharged in 1975, he spent a few months in a hospital to recover, and returned to the North. He then was tasked with managing villages, and afterwards started university studies.
5	23.07.2016, Quang Ngai	Hoang	Hoang volunteered for local guerrillas when he was 13 years old, carrying out ambush and messenger duties. Much of this was motivated by witnessing the death and destruction of the village he lived in. He was particularly proud of displaying bravery and working hard while facing very harsh conditions. He continued his career in the

			military, participating further in the Vietnamese war in Cambodia until 1989. After returning to his civilian life in the 1990s, he got married and returned to civilian life and farm work.
6	23.07.2016, Quang Ngai	My	My grew up in a 'revolutionary family' and accompanied her father to guerrilla meetings since she was four years old. She often accompanied other guerrillas – her father's friends – to propaganda meetings and performances. At 13, she left her home to become a nurse, and was very proud of her abilities and capacity to perform complex medical tasks. When the war came to an end, she was 19. She shortly married a fellow guerrilla and started a family, describing her post-war life as unimaginably difficult but choosing to remain optimistic and resourceful even despite financial and economic difficulties. Post-war, she picked up many jobs to support her family financially, such as continuing her nursing work and typing reports for local officials.
7	24.07.2016, Quang Ngai	Lan	Lan volunteered to become a part of Youth Shock Brigades at 16 years old. She also came from a 'revolutionary family', with her father and brother already a part of guerrillas and serving away from home. She described her first days away from home particularly difficult, especially knowing that she left her mother alone when joining the Youth Shock Brigades. However, she found much support among her comrades, especially other girls, and reported feeling much better as time went on. She was discharged at the end of the war and went on to become a school teacher. Post-war, she still maintained close relationships with other guerrillas and, despite many financial difficulties, reported making donations to the Veteran's Association every year.
8	27.07.2016, Hanoi	Tien	Tien volunteered for Youth Shock Brigades when she was 14 years old, running away from home and not telling her parents. She then spent the next three years carrying out standard Youth Shock Brigade duties, such as participating in building roads, supporting guerrillas in their journey to the South, and carrying weapons. She was then discharged in 1973, after completing her three year-mission. Upon returning home, she started her studies in a police academy. She maintained close contact with her fellow Youth Shock Brigade members, and participated in many charitable initiatives held by the Veteran Association.
9	24.07.2016, Quang Ngai	Nhung	Nhung first started to help the guerrillas with small administrative tasks, such as delivering messages and gathering intel. She then transferred to help at a nursing unit and treated injured soldiers. She described her life with the guerrillas as active, alluding to the fact that she was always ready to volunteer for additional tasks, such as carrying heavy boxes with food up a mountain. We did not

			have much time to speak about her life post-war, but she mentioned frequently discussing her experience with her grandchildren, often surprising them with her bravery and nonchalant attitude towards dangerous situations.
10	25.07.2016, Quang Ngai	Hong	For Hong, the precise time when she started helping the guerrillas is unclear; on the one hand, she started helping her parents with small tasks such as knitting clothes for guerrillas at the age of nine; on the other, she joined local guerrilla forces when she was 16. To do so, she had to ask her father's permission and promise that she would do her best and not desert. Her primary duties included helping injured soldiers. She also participated in carrying heavy loads for guerrillas. In 1973, her health took a toll due to carrying heavy equipment and she was sent to recover at a hospital. After a year, she went to the North to study and worked as secretary for the local youth association, often using her ethnic minority language skills that she cultivated while working with guerrillas to translate and communicate with ethnic minorities.
11	25.07.2016, Quang Ngai	Ha	Ha volunteered to become a messenger when she was 13 years old, guided by the 'hatred towards the foreign invaders' and the deaths she witnessed surrounding her. She was then educated and trained by guerrillas and worked as an accountant, carrying out administrative duties in dividing food and finances for her unit. She reported particularly appreciating the camaraderie and affection between her fellow guerrillas most. After being discharged at the end of the war, she was in her late teens. She continued working with her family on the fields and worked as a domestic helper. Speaking about her post-war life, she expressed disappointment at the increasing fragmentation of the society, but similarly reported being very close with her former fellow guerrillas.
12	27.07.2019, Da Nang	Lam	Lam joined the local guerrilla forces at 14 years old; his memories as to why are vague, stating that he followed the general sentiment and atmosphere. He later transferred to join the main forces and continued serving even after the end of the Vietnam War, although he still recounted the many difficulties of everyday life immediately after the end of the war, e.g. poverty and financial hardships. He then retired and withdrew pension as a former military officer.
13	27.07.2019, Da Nang	Loan	Loan started helping her local guerrillas from a young age, afterwards training officially as a sapper at the age of 13. Her motivation stemmed from wanting to avenge her father, who she saw being beaten up by the GVN officials. At 14, she was almost captured by a GVN official but pretended to be an injured villager, rather than a guerrilla. She then returned to civilian life in 1975, feeling initially very lost because her training was not in demand by the

			state. She therefore returned to farming and working on the fields.
14	24.07.2019, Da Nang	Nam	Nam started helping the guerrillas by distributing leaflets and flyers about the insurgency and the 'bad behaviour' of the cadres. At the time, he was 13 years old, asked to participate by one of his teachers (notably, the school was set up by the US and followed US-approved curriculum). He then joined the guerrilla forces when he was 18 years old and pursued a military career until he subsequently retired.
15	24.07.2019, Da Nang	Dong	Dong volunteered to become a messenger and a spy for the Viet Cong at a young age (she did not remember the specific age, but after calculating her year of birth and the year she subsequently joined local guerrillas, concluded that it would have been before 17 years old), after witnessing extreme violence and many sacrifices made by her family as her prime motivation. Despite not going to school and being illiterate, she mentioned many intelligent ways in which she participated in the activities, such as using local plants as a sign to signal to civilians (but not the GVN) that she was a guerrilla. She was, however, then captured by the GVN officials as part of their *chieu hoi* programme and imprisoned. She was subsequently released at the end of the war and was sent to study ('I can write now, but my handwriting is bad', she stated). She continued participating in the Party activities until she retired.
16	24.07.2019, Da Nang	Hieu	My conversation with Hieu was strikingly impersonal, despite my efforts to extract some information about his life history. I gathered that he volunteered for the Main Forces at 17; however, his motivations were not laid out in any personal way, rather focusing on the description of generic youth's patriotism. His descriptions of his daily duties were similarly general, focusing on 'every Vietnamese person's' patriotism, although from time to time, some references to more personal experiences were made. For example, he mentioned feeling lonely and pitying himself amidst the hardships of the war. These, however, were very few in number. Towards the end of the war, he was significantly injured and had to undergo treatment. Due to his injury, he could not continue fighting and returned to civilian life and farming.
17	24.07.2019, Da Nang	Huong	Huong is Hieu's wife. She volunteered to do some work behind the frontlines with guerrillas, mostly carrying weapons and nursing. After Hieu's injury, she returned to civilian life with him as one of his primary caretakers, despite many people telling her that living with such a heavily injured man would be a burden for her. Both of them returned to farming as civilians just before the end of the war in their mid-20s.

18	24.07.2019, Da Nang	Linh	Linh started helping guerrillas with small tasks, such as delivering documents and navigating her home village, at the age of 10. She then started working for them full-time. Throughout her time as a guerrilla, she always stayed in her home village, even when being persecuted by the GVN. She found support and shelter among villagers, who hid her from the Southern officials. Throughout her time as a guerrilla, she frequently used her young age as a way to bypass and trick the GVN, e.g. knowing that they don't search children as thoroughly as adults. Her subsequent transition to post-war life was relatively seamless, as she maintained her relationship with her own community and her own village. After the end of the war, she married and continued working on her family's fields. She also recounted now being on good terms with the GVN official who persecuted her most, teasing him over the fact that he was never able to arrest her.
19	9.08.2019, Hanoi	Phuong	Phuong was among the first cohort to be educated as a cadet by the Viet Cong guerrilla forces. One of the messages that he was particularly eager to convey in the interview with me was that 'we were educated children, who read classics and thought deeply'. As a cadet, he was also part of a Viet Cong propaganda troupe, working primarily in the mountains. His main activities were singing and spreading the communist message. He was then sent to be educated abroad, returned to Vietnam in his 20s and stared working as a school teacher.
20	24.08.2019, Ho Chi Minh City	Due	Like Hieu, my conversation with Due was quite impersonal despite me trying to find out more about his specific life circumstances. He joined local guerrillas at 14 years old in secret, knowing that his family would be punished if he was caught. He then continued working in the military, citing the patriotism of the whole country as being the motivator revolutionary activities. He was then sent to be educated in a university by the military officials, and returned to civilian life working as a school teacher.
21	24.08.2019, Ho Chi Minh City	Tam	Tam's motivation to participate in the Viet Cong's struggle was first shaped by her experiences working at a factory in a Southern village. She reported feeling exploited by the factory owners and motivated to join the communist cause after participating in a factory strike. She joined the guerrillas at 15. Her main job was to carry weapons and participate in ambushes. During one of these ambushes, at 19, she was arrested and sent to prison. She was released at 25, at the end of the war. She then returned to live with and help her family. Her post-war activities included administrative support for the Party, particularly those who have similarly been imprisoned.

22	24.08.2019, Ho Chi Minh City	Duc	Duc grew up in Cu Chi, one of the main sites for Southern counter-insurgency operations. According to him, therefore, his involvement with the guerrillas was 'pre-determined' by him witnessing deaths and destruction left by the GVN operations. He therefore enlisted as a local guerrilla at the age of 14, but started doing small jobs for the guerrillas, such as stealing grenades, before that. During his time with guerrillas, Duc participated in combat and ambushes. He then continued his military life, participating further in the Sino-Vietnamese war. He was discharged in 1980s. He then started working for a local tobacco production factory. As a Southern villager, he still witnessed many disruptions and protests against communism, but nevertheless reported wanting to be loyal to the communist cause and to the Party.
23	25.08.2019, Ho Chi Minh City	Hung	Hung's work with guerrillas started when he was as young as three or four years old, first helping his family – a revolutionary family – to dig tunnels to hide and shelter other guerrillas. Throughout his childhood, however, he frequently encountered guerrillas and eventually started doing small errands for them, such as covering mines with banana leaves, stealing grenades, and gathering intel. His work with guerrillas did not require him to travel or be isolated from his community, so his transition to post-war life was quite seamless. After the war, his 'good' background enabled him to go to a university and study Law.
24	13.09.2019, Hanoi	Vinh	Vinh volunteered to help Vietnamese guerrillas and foreign cadres to maintain their camps when he was 17. His first tasks included running small errands, clean and maintain camps, as well as cook food. With time, he was promoted to become a kitchen manager, and oversaw other cooks. After the war ended, he returned to his village but then chose to move to a city and work in a range of jobs, such as an accountant, developing film, and others. He reported that finding a job was not particularly difficult for him thanks to the skills and connections he had made while working for guerrillas.
25	9.08.2019, Hanoi	Phong	Phong enrolled into a cadet school at the end of the Vietnamese struggle against France. In addition to studying and training as a cadet, he worked as a messenger for the Viet Cong guerrillas. He also participated in writing songs and poems to support the communist propaganda campaign. After the war, he continued studying and enrolled into university, becoming a politician and publishing books about his time as a cadet.
26	25.08.2019, Ho Chi Minh City	Minh	Minh volunteered to join the main forces when he was 17. While he described not fully understanding communism at the time, he slowly gained a deeper understanding and loyalty to the guerrilla group as he worked for them. Much

			of his work with guerrillas included ambush, marching towards the South, and participating in combat. He then continued his military career, rising in ranks. He recounted a few stories of his life as a leader of his squad, and reported prioritising his soldiers' well-being above all. He further expressed passion for education, and held military education classes for school children.
27	17.08.2019, Nam Dinh	Xuan	Xuan joined Youth Shock Brigades at 16, together with her friends. She reported following the atmosphere of excitement that was particularly prevalent in Northern Vietnam. As a youth volunteer, she participated in standard Youth Shock Brigade duties, and additionally was put in charge of other recruits to make sure they carried out their jobs well. After three years (finishing her mission), she returned home and continued to study at school.
28	17.08.2019, Nam Dinh	Quang	Quang became part of a Youth Shock Brigade when he was 16; out of all of my interviewees, he expressed feeling most loyalty and patriotism when he volunteered. As a youth volunteer, he participated in destroying roads and building tunnels. He also expressed serious concern for discipline and being particularly scared of losing face. After completing his mission, he returned home and continued working on the fields, as well as enrolled to study at the university.
29	17.08.2019, Nam Dinh	Sang	Sang joined Youth Shock Brigades at 15, after persuading his father that he had enough strength and character to endure harsh military life. Like other youth volunteers, he participated in building roads and tunnels. He also expressed much interest in guerrillas' education, and was particularly receptive to the ideas of patriotism and national liberation. After completing his mission, he was 18 years old and chose to study. He also mentioned that as a former member of Youth Shock Brigade, he received priority in both education and employment.
30	11.08.2019. Hanoi	Quyen	Quyen first volunteered to become a part of the guerrillas at 14 in 1963; however, he was denied. Still determined to participate in the military struggle, he volunteered to become a part of Youth Shock Brigades, which had much more relaxed attitudes towards age. While working with Youth Shock Brigades, he dug tunnels, built roads, and carried weapons and equipment to support the guerrillas. He was then discharged right before the end of the war, in part due to his health – he was injured while carrying out his duties. As a result, he found it very difficult to find a job that would be the right fit for him. After waiting for the state to allocate a job for him, he decided to start his own Veteran's association with his friends. To this day, he gives talks and seminars about his time during war.
31	13.08.2019, Hanoi	Duong	Duong joined a propaganda troupe when he was 9 years old, following his older brother. Together with the troupe,

| | | | he travelled all across Vietnam, singing, putting on performances that glorified the revolutionary cause. He continued doing so until the end of the war; at the time of him being discharged, he was already in his early 20s. He continued writing music and entered higher education, afterwards starting work as a university professor. |

Indochina war

The descriptions for my interviewees who participated in the Indochina War are shorter. This is because the interviews themselves were only around 20 minutes, and rather than gaining an understanding of my interviewees' life histories, I aimed to gain an insight to the social context preceding the Vietnam War.

No	Gender	Age of enlistment	Roles	Interview date and location
1	F	16	Local guerrilla	15.09.2019, Hung Yen
2	F	17	Spying, delivering messages, digging tunnels	15.09.2019, Hung Yen
3	M	17	Main forces	15.09.2019, Hung Yen
4	F	17	Local guerrilla	15.09.2019, Hung Yen
5	F	17	Sheltering guerrillas (cooking food, providing information on the French location) (later became a local guerrilla)	15.09.2019, Hung Yen
6	F	16	Spying	15.09.2019, Hung Yen
7	F	16	Digging tunnels	15.09.2019, Hung Yen

Appendix B: Interview prompts

Prior to war

1. What was your childhood like? Can you tell me about your family?
2. What did you do before enlisting, e.g. studying, working, helping out on the fields?
3. Did you go to school? What was the atmosphere in school like? Were you educated about the war at school?
4. Where/what did you hear about the war prior to enlisting? What did you know about the enemy?
5. Why did you decide to join (ask for more details once the reason was identified, probe for factors that impacted this. Any specific events come to mind?) Did you consider any other options?
6. What was the process of enlisting? How were your activities decided/By whom?

Working with guerrillas

1. What kind of jobs were you assigned? Why do you think you were chosen to do that job? Where did you travel to? What were your first days like? What was the training like?
2. Did you miss home? How did you adjust?
3. Were you afraid when you were serving/in the battlefields? Did you ever want to run away? And if not, what made you stay?
4. Were there people your age? Any memorable people among your comrades? What was the relationship between the adults and children like? à probe for sense of belonging
5. What were the most difficult parts? How did you overcome them?
6. What did you think of your job? How did you do it? What do you think you needed to do to be good at it? Did you move ranks? Was serving as a child any different than serving as an adult?
7. Did you take any initiative to solve problems? Did you ever disobey orders?
8. Can you remember a dangerous situation that you faced? What did you do?
9. Can you tell me a few of the most memorable events?

Post-war

1. How did people react when you came home? What were your first days and weeks after you were discharged like?
2. What was the political/social situation around you after the war?
3. How did you find your job? Did you like it? Did you study for it? Could you make use of skills learned during the war? What other skills did you need to have? What kind of training was available to you?
4. How was post-war life different from war life? How did you adjust? Can you recount one of the most challenging things? How did you seek to address this? Was there any help available in this situation for you? What were your relationships like with people who didn't serve? Do you maintain relationships with other veterans? How?
5. Overall, how did your experience as a guerrilla affect your post-war life?

Appendix C: Theme analysis

This section provides additional context of the analytical framework before and during my data collection. As I have described in sections 6 and 7 of chapter 3 (Method and Methodology), my data collection, data analysis, and literature review were conducted in parallel. In other words, the process of reading relevant literature and deepening my own understanding of the social context continued as I was interpreting my data and detecting general 'themes' to my interviewees' responses. Such an approach has allowed me to be flexible in presenting my data: as I will show below, the 'predicted' themes and the themes that eventually emerged are not exactly the same. Below is the detailed breakdown of my data categorisation.

1. I first predicted a themes that would emerge from my data, as a result of my initial literature review:

Motivations for participation	- Sense of danger and wanting to protect oneself - Impact of propaganda and glorification of the war - 'Peer pressure' in school and community
Working with guerrillas	- Children's exercise of creativity and intelligence when solving difficult problems - Endurance of hardships - Gendered difficulties
Post-war reintegration	- Difficulties of coming back to civilian life after spending time in the jungle - Challenges of living in post-war Vietnam (e.g. financial hardship, unemployment)

2. While some of my predicted themes did emerge, there were still a few changes. Below is the updated table with complete and final themes as laid out in the thesis. I added the third column to further highlight 'unsaid' themes in my interviews. They were consistently present but required further contextualisation and 'reading between the lines'. The 'back and forth' between my data collection, interpretation, and literature review has enabled me to detect these unspoken themes and their importance, even if they were not explicitly articulated by my interviewees.

Motivations for participation	- Geographical divide: Sense of danger and wanting to protect oneself in the South, impact of propaganda and glorification of the war in the North - Importance of family and filial piety - Children claiming that their participation was not political while articulating concern for social justice and national liberation.	My continuous research into Confucian cultural framework and communist ideology has provided useful context to the interviewees' claims, e.g. framing ideology as a social practice was a useful 'lens' through which I interpreted the impact of propaganda and my interviewees' claims that their motivations were not political.
Working with guerrillas	- Strict rules, hierarchy, and discipline in the Viet Cong guerrilla group	Many interviewees articulated that they started to gain political knowledge as they spent more

	- Children's exercise of creativity and intelligence when solving difficult problems - Endurance of hardships - Gendered difficulties and spaces for female bonding and friendship - Humour and play - Children 'appropriating' the rules and learning to navigate and bypass them	time with guerrillas; researching the ways in which the Viet Cong deliberately socialised their recruits was particularly insightful to contextualise the change in political awareness of my interviewees.
Post-war reintegration	- The relatively seamless reintegration of many interviewees, particularly local guerrillas. - Prioritisation of guerrillas in employment and education - Importance of friendship and camaraderie - Difficulties of coming back to civilian life after spending time in the jungle - Challenges of living in post-war Vietnam (e.g. financial hardship, unemployment)	The positions of my interviewees as victors was another 'unsaid' theme, most likely because my interviewees were already used to their position of privilege. I therefore needed to do further research on the power relations and the social position of former GVN supporters to contextualise further the experiences of my interviewees.